Meteors That Enlighten the Earth:
Napoleon and the Cult of Great Men

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Matthew Donald Zarzeczny, M.A.
Graduate Program in History
2009

Dissertation Committee:
Dale K. Van Kley, Advisor
Alice Conklin
Nathan Rosenstein
Napoleon promoted and honored great men throughout his reign. In addition to comparing himself to various great men, he famously established a Legion of Honor on 19 May 1802 to honor both civilians and soldiers, including non-ethnically French men. Napoleon not only created an Irish Legion in 1803 and later awarded William Lawless and John Tennent the Legion of Honour, he also gave them an Eagle with the inscription “L’Indépendence d’Irlande.” Napoleon awarded twenty-six of his generals the marshal’s baton from 1804 through 1815 and in 1806, he further memorialized his soldiers by deciding to erect a Temple to the Glory of the Great Army modeled on Ancient designs. From 1806 through 1815, Napoleon had more men interred in the Panthéon in Paris than any other French leader before or after him. In works of art depicting himself, Napoleon had his artists allude to Caesar, Charlemagne, and even Moses. Although the Romans had their legions, Pantheon, and temples in Ancient times and the French monarchy had their marshals since at least 1190, Napoleon blended both Roman and French traditions to compare himself to great men who lived in ancient and medieval times and to recognize the achievements of those who lived alongside him in the nineteenth century.

Analyzing Napoleon’s ever-changing personal cult of “great men,” and his recognition of contemporary “great men” who contributed to European or even human
civilization and not just French civilization, is original. While work does exist on the French cults of Greco-Roman antiquity and of “great men” prior to 1800, Napoleon appears only fleetingly in David Bell, Jean-Claude Bonnet, and George Armstrong Kelly’s discussions of the cult of great men. None of the burgeoning historiography adequately takes Napoleon’s place in the story of this cult into perspective. My dissertation serves as a further exploration of the cult of great men, including its place in Napoleonic and European history and the alleged efforts of its members to enlighten the earth.
Dedication

Dedicated to Josephine Marie Zarzeczny
On 19 May 2006 for my doctorial exam on The Roman Empire, Dr. Nathan Rosenstein asked me to answer the following question:

It is the year 1805 and the recently crowned Emperor Napoleon is traveling on a long journey by carriage. As he is mulling over the challenges that face him in governing his new empire, Napoleon falls into a doze, and the Emperor Trajan appears to him in a dream. Describe what the two Emperors say to each other about the arts and techniques of governing empires, bearing in mind that while Napoleon may know something about Imperial Rome, Trajan has no information about early 19th century Europe. (You may cast their discussion in dialogue form.)

I answered as follows:

Napoleon’s plans to launch a Franco-Spanish invasion of Great Britain now seemed unrealistic. Like Philip II’s Spanish Armada before him, Napoleon’s international, continental fleet proved unable to overcome the sea forces of the large island nation to Europe’s north. So, he turned his attention eastward, sending his Grand Army from its positions on the English Channel through Germany towards the Austrian Empire, the largest member of the decaying Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. The stress of the impending decisive battle against the forces of Kaiser Francis and Tsar Alexander wears heavily on the newly crowned French Emperor as his carriage passed through the lands of a disunited empire that claimed to succeed the once mighty Roman Empire of antiquity. With thoughts of past and future glory in his mind and considerations of his own role in history ever present, Napoleon drifted into sleep... Napoleon found himself surrounded by darkness. Everywhere around him there was no light. Yet, in the distance he noticed a figure sitting upon a golden throne. Napoleon approached rapidly. Having bravely carried the flag across the bridge at Arcole during the French Revolution as Austrian soldiers failed to shoot him down, he was fearless in this darkness. But he wondered: had he died? Is this a God seated before him? Napoleon stood courageously as the seated man, dressed in ancient armor, studied Napoleon. A few minutes passed before at last
Napoleon spoke.

NAPOLEON: “I am the Emperor Napoleon of the French. Who is it that sits before me?”

TRAJAN (Roman emperor from 97 through 117 A.D.): “I am Trajan, known as the Best to the senate and the people of Rome. I am the successor of the imperator Nerva, who reigned after the chaotic rule of Domitian.”

NAPOLEON: “Yes, I know you; although I’m not sure how it is that we seem to miraculously understand each other’s language . . . No matter. I have studied much on Roman history and have to a large extent modeled my own government on the precedents established by yourself and your fellow Roman emperors. I even held a consulate like your gods, Julius Caesar, and Augustus, did over a century before you. I am now on my way to fight against a man who calls himself Roman Emperor, but he is not worthy of the title. It is I who will carry on your traditions; when my reign is over Paris shall be resplendent with triumphal arches and my statue will rest on top of a column at the Place Vendôme in direct imitation of your column in Rome that celebrates you great victorious over Decebalus in the Dacian Wars before you marched eastward like Alexander the Great to defeat the Parthians, something that Caesar had hoped to accomplish had not those vile assassins, Cassius and Brutus, deprived your empire of that great man. I once spoke to my forces as though we were following in Alexander and Caesar’s footsteps during our campaign in Egypt and Syria. If not for that damned British admiral Nelson, we would have marched over the same fields of battle on which your own armies triumphed so many centuries ago.”

TRAJAN: “Your admiration of my achievements is certainly warranted, but I have no knowledge of “the French” or even what befell my empire after my death during my unfinished war in Mesopotamia. I have remained in this darkness, alone, for I do not know how long, but perhaps it is indeed to pass on my knowledge to you who claim to succeed us. You do have a Roman look about you. You are also right in your admiration of the Macedonian Alexander. A secretary of mine named Suetonius had access to our imperial archives and as you may know documented the lives of my predecessors, the twelve Caesars before me. He wrote on what my predecessors thought about this heroic figure, but there is something foremost I must tell you before I return to this matter. You frown! Well, do you doubt the objectivity of our histories? Some may say that his accounts are biased and meant to detract from these imperators in order to improve my own image, but if I am the Best, why would this be necessary?”

“Anyway, my first suggestion for you would be to adopt your successor. Nerva was wise in choosing me and I am confident that my own chosen successor Hadrian will continue my great work.”

NAPOLEON: “But he didn’t! Hadrian abandoned your conquests east of the Euphrates and built a wall in Britain rather than push northward to conquer the whole of that island. Rather than conquer new territory, Hadrian only consolidated the empire, just traveling around its provinces more so than...
practically any other emperor. His adopted son, Antoninus Pius, would resume Rome’s glory by extending Roman rule in Britain to a new wall that spanned an even shorter distance which perhaps some historian two centuries from now might refer to as ‘more scientific.’ Antoninus’ adopted heir, Marcus Aurelius the Philosopher, attempted to re-conquer the Mesopotamian province, but the plague ravaged his army and prevented this project from realization. Near the end of his life, he attempted to defeat the Quadi and Marcomanni north of the Danube in Germania, perhaps to annex their territory as Augustus planned to do before Varus’ defeat by Arminius at the Teutoburg Forest in A.D. 9. Marcus’ victories here as well were negated by a successor. Just as Hadrian abandoned your conquests in the Middle East, that psychopath Commodus, Marcus’ natural son, concluded a peace with the Germanic tribes.”

TRAJAN: “While it pains me to learn that Hadrian did not apparently live up to my expectations, your final statement is further proof of why adoptive succession is better. One of my admirers wrote a convincing argument for this conviction and you would be wise to read it. For as much as you know about our history, you should consider why the twelve Caesars before me erred. The Divine Gaius Julius Caesar the Liberator and Father of the Fatherland did not have a son to succeed him, regardless of what Antony might have hoped to accomplish with Caesarion, the bastard son of that serpent of the Nile, Cleopatra. No, Caesar adopted the best of his kinsmen Augustus the Father of the Fatherland and of the Entire Human Race. Later murders and usurpations in the Julia-Claudian Family prevented the stability in the empire. Caligula and Nero’s madness tarnished our imperial office. Even Claudius, under whose reign Britain finally became Roman, met with assassination. After Nero killed himself Galba, Otho, and Vitellius each sought to usurp control of the empire before Vespasian’s victory in this two year period of civil war. As you should know, Vespasian did not follow adoptive succession. Instead, his family’s reign ended in a bloodbath comparable to that of the Julio-Claudians.”

NAPOLEON: “Yes, but you came from a republican tradition in which the ideal was for the leading man to hold such top offices as consul or to be recognized as an imperator. Although my empire also has a senate, my neighbors do not agree with republican traditions. I am surrounded by kings and emperors who believe that they rule by divine right, that their bloodline is superior to all others. I have adopted my wife’s son by her first marriage, Eugene, to succeed me if necessary, as Josephine has yet to give me my heir, but for the other kings and emperors of Europe to accept me, I must have a son of my own. Besides, the decade that preceded my reign was one of opportunists and many forms of government. If I do not have a son behind which my subjects might rally in the event of my death, who knows who or what might replace me!”

TRAJAN: “Divine right? We Romans deify the best of our rulers after their deaths, as Caesar did with Pompey after the Egyptians murdered this former consul of Rome, and as we subsequently did with Caesar, Augustus, Claudius,
Vespasian, and Titus. Caligula may have thought himself a god, but he was not so.”

NAPOLEON: “Then, you need not worry about this particular Christian concept.”

TRAJAN: “Christian, eh? I think I recall having a correspondence about these liar Jews with one of my provincial administrators. I’ve had many engaging dialogues, especially with Pliny.”

NAPOLEON: “Well, much has changed in Europe since your reign. Despite the persecutions of the Christians under Diocletian, who established a system of Roman government alien to your own, a dominate rather than a principate, and a tetrarchy of four emperors (two superior Augusti and two junior Caesars) that divided the empire, Constantine the Great would restore the imperial unity and with his Edict of Milan following his victory at the Milvian Bridge over Maxentius, Constantine recognized Christianity as a religion that should not be persecuted. He only became a Christian on his deathbed and Theodosius roughly fifty years later ultimately made Christianity the official religion and as some have argued, so began the decline of Rome . . . Christianity, although itself divided, remains the dominant religion in Europe and the notion of proclaiming ourselves or our predecessors as gods would be unacceptable to our people.”

TRAJAN: “Absolutely astonishing! Our empire was one of many beliefs and many gods. The peoples of empire worshipped gods from Greece, Egypt, and Judea, in addition to those of our Eternal City. In fact, our network of roads and trade routes and our efforts to build temples in the provinces allowed for a great exchange of religions across Our Sea (Mare Nostrum). Our empire had imperial cults, just as much of Isis and others.”

NAPOLEON: “We have a religion of the majority, but really only three others that I recognize as significant enough to respect. Personally, I have no religion, although I have often wished that our system was a bit more as yours and more as that empire which you and your fellow imperators admired most. I always admired Alexander for declaring himself a god.”

TRAJAN: “There is much that we learned from that great conqueror, who did, after all, correctly continue the Persian tradition of satrapies and treated Darius III’s family with respect, even marrying the Great King’s daughter Stateira as Alexander’s second wife. We inherited his system when we annexed Hellenistic kingdoms in the East and treated many of these states as client kingdoms, allowing the descendents of Alexander’s commanders to govern until they disobeyed us and annexation became necessary. Incidentally, we even used Alexander’s campaigns as our sources for information on Parthia! My contemporary, Pliny, understood Caesar as greater than Pompey Magnus whose triumphs equaled “the brilliance of the exploits” of Alexander the Great. Comparisons of both Pompey and Augustus with Alexander appeared in word and art within their lifetimes. True Romans like me appreciate glory and many flattered Pompey for following Alexander’s path of eastern conquest, Caesar for
serving as an heir to Alexander, and Augustus for striving to conquer the world as Alexander aspired to do.”

NAPOLEON: “Well, maybe the world as you understood it.”

TRAJAN: “Whatever you mean by that, but anyway, just as Alexander the Great, was sometimes called philokyros or ‘friend of Cyrus’ the Great of Persia in part because of Alexander’s understanding of Persian history, so too did Caesar read Xenophon’s Boyhood of Cyrus and parts of Alexander’s history. You look young, Emperor Napoleon, and so you must have begun your reign perhaps not long ago. Alexander, as you know, was one of the most youthful of conquerors. Caesar by contrast did not have age on his side when he became dictator. While campaigning in Spain, Caesar actually cried to his friends that he failed to achieve greatness at as young an age as Alexander. Caesar like Crassus before him and Antony after hoped to emulate Alexander in the East, but alas, those assassins ended these dreams, at least until Octavian seemed to revive some hope that he would follow in their divine footsteps. Augustus showed respect for Alexander’s mummy by crowning it with a golden diadem, a worthy gesture, unlike when Caligula stole Alexander’s breastplate from his tomb in Alexandria. What I want you to understand from these examples, Napoleon, is that the heroes of the late republic/early empire presented themselves in a manner reminiscent of an earlier hero, someone whom the people recognized and admired. Much of our system was based on fear and respect. Our enemies had to understand us as god-like, invincible, so that they knew any affront against the Romans would equal at least a beating if not worse. You want your subjects and adversaries alike to know that any time they rise against you, they face the punishment of a foe or master worthy of legend.”

NAPOLEON: “Oh, I have long linked my name to those of many individuals who shaped history before and after your reign.”

TRAJAN: “But you must go beyond even their achievements if you want to be really effective. We chide Caligula for not continuing the conquest of Germania as he led some to believe and Domitian for not defeating the Dacians as decisively as I did. I outshined Domitian. Had I lived longer, I might have taken Roman arms even farther than Alexander took Macedonian arms and annexed more than just Arabia, Armenia, Assyria, Dacia, and Mesopotamia. Consider the goals of Alexander versus those of Caesar and Augustus. Before Alexander’s death, he planned campaigns against the Arabians and Carthaginians. Had Caesar avoided death on the Ides of March, he intended to expel the Dacians from the Black Sea area and Thrace before launching an attack on Parthia by way of Lesser Armenia. Just three days after his death, this great campaign would have begun! Perhaps Caesar’s genius would have succeeded where Crassus’ lack of failed. Regardless, I realized Caesar’s plans! I conquered both Dacia and part of Parthia in a fashion that as you even admit no other Roman did. Augustus’ acquisition of the upper Sava valley was regarded as a potential base for operations against the Dacians, but even this great man did not achieve what I accomplished in that part
of our empire. Much has been made by Horace of Augustus’ never realized, but
planned expeditions to Britannia—something that we thought Caligula might
accomplish, but that Claudius finally carried out decades later. Horace also
expected that eventually Augustus would add the Persians to our empire. Like
Caesar, Augustus planned to consolidate his hold on Europe before attacking
Parthia, but the defeat in Germania prevented such consolidation and so Augustus
neither conquered Britannia nor Parthia. And to think that he even hoped to go
beyond the Rhine to China!”

NAPOLEON: “If only he understood how far away that really was . . .”

TRAJAN: “I just hope that you understand how such emperors as
Claudius and I achieved our fame. We accomplished what other even great men
could not accomplish. I am not truly representative of any other Roman emperor
or of their policies. I did what they did not do. That is why I am called Trajanus
Optimus. If you really want glory, you must achieve what even your idols did
not. Darius III referred to himself as ‘king of the world,’ and some have called
Alexander ‘King of the Universe.’ Neither title is better than ‘best.’”

NAPOLEON: “My star will guide me to great victories.”

TRAJAN: “Perhaps, but many a conqueror’s star has faded somewhere
along the way. And so, perhaps my last bit of advice for governing an empire is
to remember that while you want to conquer for the sake of personal glory as well
as that of your people, you want your enemies to know that they forced the
conquest on themselves. The vanquished or subjugated must understand that you
are not a tyrant, because you will need some of their support and it is best that you
use the occasional decisive victory to remind your enemies that any challenge,
whether internal or external, will meet with determined and brutal consequences.
Remember that we in command are the ones with real honor. Honor is an
important concept for us, especially in order to maintain the loyalty of the
soldiers, which is naturally necessary if you want to frighten your external foes
into submission. Similarly, never underestimate the power of patronage. Treat
your people as clients.”

NAPOLEON: “I’m already ahead of you on that point. I’ve created an
award called the Legion of Honor to recognize worthy individuals who will owe
their public recognition to me.”

TRAJAN: “‘Legion of Honor,’” an excellent and Roman-sounding title,
indeed.”

NAPOLEON: “The award is a bit more merit-based, but I can be
considered a patron of sorts in other ways, even in the cultural sense by
contracting artists to produce great works, which bring them a nice revenue, while
glorifying me. And I have been sure to reward my best generals with a special
title, “marshal,” my family with imperial titles, and my loyal collaborators, er I
mean supporters with other significant imperial offices, while allowing even my
political opponents senatorial offices in order to placate them. I have done much
to keep my people on my side so that they follow me in my campaigns across
Europe and the Mediterranean.”

TRAJAN: “Good, but remember, that we Romans only conquered where and when we had to and we did so over many centuries, which allowed us to Romanize the various provinces in a much more progressive than forced fashion. We could have annexed Illyria, Greece, Spain, Africa, and Egypt well before we actually did so. We could have taken Carthage after the Second Punic War. There’s a way to gain a certain respect from the world for seeming the victim initially. One might see us in at the end of the Republic as taking only so much unruliness from our neighbors until during our imperial period when we finally showed the world that we had enough already. If you want to see a real bully, well . . . Anyway, our conquests were necessary for the stability of the world as much as personal glory and even our transformation from Republic to Empire began maybe as far back as Marius and continued throughout the entire century that ended in Augustus’ reign.’

“Now heed my advice of the arts and techniques of governing empires: 1) remember that adoptive succession is better than dynastic; 2) connect your name with that of other great men of history; 3) use military conquests for obtaining personal glory; 4) try to outdo your heroes; 5) if possible, have a religious element associated with your imperial position, which can be advantageous, as people are less likely to challenge someone if it means risking divine wrath; 6) maintain a sense of honor for yourself and your proponents; and 7) use patronage to gain devotion and a sense of duty from your clients. And that is all. Wake up now!!”

As Trajan thundered his final command, Napoleon awoke. He would indeed follow much of Trajan’s advice and over the next seven years, Napoleon’s empire would stretch from Spain to Russia. Great victories at Austerlitz in 1805 and Wagram in 1809 catapulted Napoleon into the pantheon of legendary rulers that included Alexander, Caesar, Augustus, and Trajan, but Trajan’s advice was that of someone from another age in human history. The second century A.D. was not the nineteenth. Moreover, Trajan’s wars of conquest, while “glorious” and romantic, may not have been all that wise. Perhaps, Hadrian’s notion of consolidation had more benefits to the actual empire than wars of glory, as even before Trajan died the newly conquered Mesopotamian province exploded in rebellion. Thus, like Trajan, Napoleon’s empire attempted to go farther than it could and within ten years of that fateful dream, Napoleon’s empire crumbled much faster than either that of Alexander or the Caesars so many centuries earlier.¹

One may wonder if such a hypothetical dialogue has any basis in reality. While Napoleon may not have imagined such a discussion with Trajan specifically, he certainly considered Trajan among the great men admired by Napoleon and certainly knew enough of Roman history to sustain many of the historical comments indicated in the dialogue above. In 1808, Napoleon requested that a librarian and geographer work together to collect for Napoleon “memoirs about the campaigns which have taken place on the Euphrates and against the Parthians, beginning with that of Crassus up to the eighth century, and including those of Antonius, Trajan, Julian, etc.; he is to mark upon maps of suitable size the route which each army followed, together with the ancient and modern names of the countries and principal towns, and add notes on the geographical features and historical descriptions of each enterprise, taking these from the original authors.”

Around the same time, Madame de Rémusat reports that Napoleon took care to encourage talent, especially when his own glory was the aim of its efforts. The ‘Triomphe de Trajan’ was given at the Paris Opera. The poem was by Esménard, and both he and the composer received presents….Trajan was represented burning papers that contained the secret of a conspiracy with his own hand. This recalled what Bonaparte had done at Berlin. The triumph of Trajan was represented with magnificent pomp. The decorations were superb; the conqueror appeared in a chariot drawn by four white horses. All Paris flocked to the spectacle; the applause was unstinted, and charmed the Emperor.

---

Moreover, Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne references churchmen who during the imperial phase declared that Napoleon “was more fortunate than Augustus” and “more virtuous than Trajan.”

Napoleon also certainly read and wrote on Plato who is famous for the use of the dialogue and actually did fantasize similar fictional discussions among great men. For example, in the late 1780s, Napoleon wrote “an imaginary correspondence between King Theodore of Corsica” (1694-1756) and Horace Walpole (1717-1797). In 1793, Napoleon wrote another fictional dialogue, “The Supper at Beaucaire” in which a manufacturer of Montpellier, a Marseillais, a Nîmois, and a soldier in Carteaux’s army (believed to be Napoleon) discuss recent events. This soldier turns to discuss and defend some of the specific leading revolutionary figures: “Dubois-Crancé, and Albitte are constant friends of the people who have never deviated from the straight path. Condorcet, Brissot, Barbaroux were always considered villains when they were pure; it is the privilege of the good always to have a bad reputation in the eyes of the bad. You call Carteaux an assassin when he has done his utmost to preserve order and discipline…” The soldier goes on to denounce Napoleon’s former hero Paoli for deceiving the people and crushing “the true friends of liberty.” The soldier also alludes to antiquity, saying,

---
4 As quoted in Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, Private memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte during the Periods of the Directory, the Consulate, and the Empire, Vol. II (Philadelphia: Carey & Lea, 1831), 290.
6 Ibid., 230-231.
7 As quoted in Ibid., 233.
8 As quoted in Ibid., 234.
“it is more easy to praise Decius than to imitate him.”

The massive volume of writings produced by Napoleon and that still exist contain many discussions and commentaries on the great men of history. Paoli, Trajan, and many others appear throughout Napoleon’s letters, imagined dialogues, and in various other mediums at times in a hagiographic and at other times in a critical manner. This dissertation tells the story of Napoleon’s cult of great men and how it evolved and changed throughout his remarkable life.

I thank and am enormously indebted to my advisor, Dr. Dale Van Kley, for the hours he took to make this Ph.D. happen. Without his intellectual input, this dissertation would never have been transformed into something defensible. In addition to my three committee members (Drs. Alice Conklin, Nathan Rosenstein, and Dale Van Kley), a number of other mentors, colleagues, and institutions have supported my research, read drafts of chapters for this dissertation, and offered helpful suggestions that I have incorporated into the final version of this project. My parents, Daniel and Sharon Zarzeczny, in addition to providing me with moral and financial support, proofread drafts of chapters. My grandmother, Joann Smith, purchased many books for me that I used as references. I would like to thank all members of Dr. Dale Van Kley’s seminar on the European Enlightenment from 1680 to 1780 for their ideas and suggestions in writing the prospectus (particularly Christine LaHue, Deirdre McMurty, and Mircea Platon), as well as Dr. Susan P. Conner, J. David Markham, Dr. Thomas C. Sosnowski, and Alexander Stavropoulos who also looked at drafts of my dissertation prospectus and offered

9 As quoted in Ibid., 236-237.
constructive and encouraging criticisms. My father and Markham also offered
suggestions on the first draft of this dissertation. Additional thanks go to Joseph Clarke,
Dan Edelstein, Franz Fillafer, Jason Kuznicki, Kenneth Loiselle, Norman Ravitch, Steven
H. Smith, Tom Holmberg, Paul Vallet, and Ryan Whyte for answering dissertation-
related questions that I posed on H-France and on The Napoleon Series Discussion
Forum, as well as to David Avrom Bell and David Markham for replying to my email
questions.

If anything in particular sustained my resolve in triumphing over all the many
hurdles faced in accomplishing this project, it is the words of a great woman, Madame
Marie-Claude Thomas, who once told me, “We try until we succeed.”
Vita

1994-1998…………………………………..Padua Franciscan High School
1998-2002…………………………………..B.A. French and History, Baldwin-Wallace College
2002-2004…………………………………..M.A. History, Kent State University
2004-present………………………………...Graduate Teaching Associate, Department of History, The Ohio State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: History
# Table of Contents

Abstract.......................................................................................................................... ii

Dedication........................................................................................................................ iv

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... v

Vita................................................................................................................................. xvi

List of Figures.................................................................................................................. xix

Introduction....................................................................................................................... 1
  The Cult of Great Men and Napoleon................................................................. 8
  Sources, Method, and Argument................................................................. 13
  Summary of the Argument........................................................................... 24

Chapter 1: The Eighteenth Century Cult of Great Men............................................. 28
  The Old Regime Cult of Great Men.......................................................... 30
  The Enlightenment Cult of Great Men.................................................... 34
  The French Revolutionary Cult of Great Men........................................... 40
  Preliminary Conclusions.......................................................................... 45

Chapter 2: The Young Napoleon before the Republic............................................. 49
  Napoleon and the Cult of Corsican Heroes............................................. 51
  Napoleon and the Cult of Ancient and Medieval Heroes......................... 56
  Napoleon and the Cult of English Heroes, Part I....................................... 59
  Conclusions - Napoleon and the Onset of the Revolution......................... 63

Chapter 3: The Republican Napoleon? (1792-1804)............................................ 67
  The Case for a Republican Napoleon....................................................... 68
  The Case against a Republican Napoleon, Part I – Napoleon Bonaparte and Egypt................................................................. 90
  The Case against a Republican Napoleon, Part II – Napoleon Bonaparte and Catholicism................................................................. 109
  From Republican to Imperialist............................................................... 113
  xvii
List of Figures

Figure 1. *The Tree of Diderot and d’Alembert* as reproduced in Robert Darnton’s *The Great Cat Massacre And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (1984)….. 37

Figure 2. Jacques-Louis David’s painting of the *Oath of the Horatii* (left) and sketch of the *Oath of the Tennis Court* (right)……………………………………………..41

Figure 3. *The Emperor Napoleon in His Study at the Tuileries* (1812) by Jacques-Louis David……………………………………………………………………………….48

Figure 4. Jacques-Louis David’s painting depicting Napoleon crowning Empress Josephine during the 1804 coronation ceremony……………………………………142

Figure 5. Jacques-Louis David’s portrait of Napoleon crossing the Alps………………….148

Figure 6. Antoine-Jean Gros’ portrait of *Napoleon Visiting Plague Victims at Jaffa*....161

Figure 7. *Apotheosis of Napoleon* (1807) by Andrea Appiani…………………………………….164

Figure 8. Scan I made of my 20 francs gold coin of 1809………………………………………..165

Figure 9. Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres’ portrait of Napoleon in his coronation robes…………………………………………………………………………………………………166

Figure 10. Photographs of the Arc de Triomphe de l’Etoile (left) and the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel (right) taken by Matthew Zarzeczny in Paris in May 2001…………………………………………………………………………………………169

Figure 11. Baron Antoine-Jean Gros’s painting depicting a Romanticized revolutionary Napoleon braving Austrian guns by attempting to cross a bridge at Arcola in November 1796………………………………………………………………………………242

Figure 12. Scan I made of the front of my French medallion from 28 July 1833 depicting the statue of Napoleon in his military uniform on top of the Vendôme Column...253
Figure 13. Scan I made of the reverse of my medallion…………………………………….254

Figure 14. Photographs of Napoleon as sculpted on the Arc de Triomphe de l’Etoile (left) and in Les Invalides (center and right) taken by Matthew Zarzeczny in Paris in May 2001……………………………………………………………………………………………………………….257
Introduction

Napoleon once declared: “Great men are like meteors; they shine and consume their light in order to enlighten the earth.” He promoted and honored great men throughout his reign. In art and literature, he presented himself as a modern example of “the world’s great leaders: Alexander, who conquered the East and dreamed of conquering the world; Caesar, Augustus, Charlemagne—the creators and the restorers of the Roman Empire whose very names were synonymous with the idea of a universal civilization.” In addition to comparing himself to various great men, he famously established a Legion of Honor on 19 May 1802 to honor both civilians and soldiers, including non-ethnically French men. Napoleon not only created an Irish Legion in 1803 and later awarded William Lawless and John Tennent the Legion of Honour, he also gave them an Eagle with the inscription “L’Indépendence d’Irlande.” Napoleon awarded twenty-six of his generals the marshal’s baton from 1804 through 1815 and in 1806, he further memorialized his soldiers by deciding to erect a Temple to the Glory of

13 R. J. Tennant, “John Tennent of Napoleon’s Irish Legion,” *First Empire: The International*
the Great Army modeled on Ancient designs.14 From 1806 through 1815, Napoleon had
more men interred in the Panthéon in Paris than any other French leader before or after
him. In works of art depicting himself, Napoleon had his artists allude to “Caesar,
Charlemagne, and even Moses.”15 In Napoleonic paintings, even when “the desired
subjects are national and contemporary, they are also ‘Homeric,’” because they “display
the ‘grandeur’ of the heroic virtues…”16 Although the Romans had their legions,
Pantheon, and temples in Ancient times and the French monarchy had their marshals
since at least 1190, Napoleon blended both Roman and French traditions to compare
himself to great men who lived in ancient and medieval times and to recognize the
achievements of those who lived alongside him in the nineteenth century. He also used
the cult of great men as essentially an oriflamme out of his belief that the “French are
what the Gauls were: fierce and fickle. They have one fetish; honour. They must have
distinctions. See how they bow before the stars of strangers!”17

In Napoleon and Europe, Frederick W. Kagan recently asked, “How important
are the ‘great men’ of history compared to their numberless subjects, fellow citizens, and

---

14 Napoleon’s interest in ancient precedents persisted well after his departure from Egypt. In
addition to the examples pertaining to the cult of great men mentioned in the main text, he also ordered, for
example, “a big pyramid on the battlefield of Marengo and an elephant made from the melted-down guns
of Spanish rebels.” Robert B. Holtman, The Napoleonic Revolution (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State
15 Rafe Blaufarb, Napoleon: Symbol for an Age, A Brief History with Documents (New York:
Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008), 13.
16 Christopher Prendergast, Napoleon and History Painting: Antoine-Jean Gros’s La Bataille
17 See the entry for November 21 in Napoleon Bonaparte, The Napoleon Calendar: A Quotation
from the Works and Sayings of Napoleon for Every Day of the Year compiled by Dr. A. S. Rappoport, ed.
As indicated by the quotation with which I began this Introduction, for Napoleon, great men played a, if not the, crucial role in molding history’s course. But what makes a great man to Napoleon? How did Napoleon define great men? Why are the “heroes” he most chose for comparison “great”? Napoleon once asserted that “Great tragedy is the school of great men.” Did all the men whom Napoleon considered “great” experience “great tragedy”? Are great men therefore also tragic figures? Is great tragedy a necessary experience for one to achieve greatness? Napoleon also said, “The men who have changed the world never did so by winning over the rulers, but always by exciting the masses.”

What men does he refer to and how did they and he “change the world…by exciting the masses”?

Where did all of these ideas come from? Was it the Enlightenment? After all, in 1807, Napoleon wrote to his brother that he should be convinced by “reason and the

---

19 Just as Napoleon’s notions of universal rights did not always extend to slaves and women, so did his concept of “great” not apply to all aspects of individuals’ characters. As Napoleon hoped, he joined the Cult of Great Men and became a hero for people who lived even centuries after his death. In their autobiography, Ben and Joe Weider, founders of the International Federation of Body Building—a member of the International Olympic Committee, address their cult of great men as consisting of not just such famous bodybuilders as Arnold Schwarzenegger, but also Alexander the Great and Napoleon Bonaparte. Both historical leaders appear in the book’s Index! Ben Weider, with whom I have corresponded and who subsequently made me a Fellow of the International Napoleonic Society, has joined the ranks of history’s great men in his own right as he is also president of the International Napoleonic Society, a Knight of the National Order of Quebec, an accomplished author, and a recipient of the Legion of Honor established by Napoleon. Alexander, Napoleon, and Arnold, like most if not all, great men are still flawed. One may be great in one or more aspects, but nevertheless have other characteristics that should not be praised. After all, a moral man could not look upon all of Alexander, Napoleon, and Arnold’s romantic and sexual relations as models to follow. Of course, perhaps it is these flaws that make them great men, i.e. people whose actions and motivations as fellow humans we may understand and whose footsteps we may realistically be able to follow, rather than gods whom no man can really truly know or whose power men cannot possess. See Ben and Joe Weider, Brothers of Iron: How The Weider Brothers Created the Fitness Movement and Built a Business Empire (Champaign: SportsPublishingLLC.com, 2006), 36, 61, 63, 67, 281, 299.
20 See the entry for March 10 in The Napoleon Calendar: A Quotation from the Works and
enlightenment of your century;” 21 in 1808, Gioacchino Giuseppe Serangeli painted Napoleon literally “bathed in light” as the “incarnation of enlightenment;” 22 in 1809, Napoleon described his era as “these enlightened days;” 23 and Johann Goethe described Napoleon as “always enlightened by reason … He was in a permanent state of enlightenment.” 24 How exactly did Napoleon enlighten the earth? Are there any connections between the High Enlightenment idea that certain “literary and political figures…were mainly men whose ‘greatness’ could excuse their failings” and who could be esteemed and admired “despite their vices” and Napoleon’s ideas of great men, including himself, still being great, regardless of imperfections or failures? 25 George Armstrong Kelly writes, for example, that the marquis de Vauvenargues, the High Enlightenment author of the sentiments quoted above, “points toward Napoleon.” 26 Or is the influence of the Enlightenment on Napoleon not as strong as one might think? “After all,” remarked Napoleon, “priests are worth more than all the Cagliostros, 27 all the Kants,

\[\text{References:}\]

22 Prendergast, Napoleon and History Painting: Antoine-Jean Gros’s La Bataille d’Eylau, 78-79.
26 Ibid., 137.
27 Napoleon also refers to the Italian Count Cagliostro on 1 June 1816: “As soon as I had power, I immediately re-established religion. I made it the groundwork and foundation upon which I built. I considered it as the support of sound principles and good morality, both in doctrine and in practice. Besides, such is the restlessness of men, that his mind requires that something undefined and marvelous which religion offers; and it is better for him to find it there, than to seek it of Cagliostro, of Mademoiselle Lenormand, or of the fortune-tellers and impostors.” Thus, Napoleon had a low opinion of Cagliostro, who represents a famous figure not considered a great man by Napoleon. Napoleon, “Emperor, 1804-14,” History in Quotations: Reflecting 5000 Years of World History, ed. M. J. Cohen and John Major (London:}


and all the dreamers of Germany.””

Richard Mayne notes that “Napoleon saw himself not only as ‘a crowned Washington’ but also as a pan-European Emperor. ‘I am not the successor of Louis XIV,’ he declared, ‘but of Charlemagne.’” B. Reizov discusses Charlemagne “in terms of theories of the role of ‘the destiny of great men’ and the durability of their acts. ‘Clearly it is no longer the history of Charlemagne, but that of Napoleon.’” Napoleon read Gabriel Bonnot de Mably’s writings in which the abbé wrote about Charlemagne. Did Napoleon at any point in his career admire Charlemagne as a lawgiver and constitutionalist, because Charlemagne is perhaps the only hero in Mably’s *Observations*..., and he is a hero for Mably for that reason? Napoleon also read Charles Rollin’s history of Rome. Is there at any point a “republican” Napoleon, because the only “heroes” in Rollin and Jean-Baptiste Louis Crévier’s history are republicans selflessly devoted to the common good? Was Napoleon really ever an admirer of republican “great men” on account of their republicanism?

Napoleon, who wrote that he “aimed at universal monarchy,” compared himself to certain emperors from ancient and medieval history who demonstrated universal pretensions, especially Alexander, Caesar, Constantine, and Charlemagne. Exactly what

---

28 From the entry for July 23 of Napoleon Bonaparte, *The Napoleon Calendar: A Quotation from the Works and Sayings of Napoleon for every Day in the Year*.


aspects of Alexander’s, Caesar’s, Constantine’s, and Charlemagne’s rules did Napoleon see himself as embodying and emulating? He admires both their military prowess and aspects of their “universalism.” Napoleon admired Alexander’s blending of Greek and Persian culture and the Macedonian’s use of Greek and Persian soldiers as a Great King who led the armies of three continents. Napoleon similarly expressed his hopes of finishing “the war against the Turks with Arabic, Greek, and Armenian troops” and winning “a battle at Issus,”32 where Alexander won one of his greatest victories.

Napoleon admired Caesar’s efforts to expand Roman civilization throughout the known world as well. When the Institute de France proposed to give Napoleon the title of Germanicus, Napoleon responded that if he “desired any title, it would be that of Caesar,”33 “whose genius and boldness were equally great.”34 Napoleon spoke of summoning “Church Councils like Constantine”35 and cited Charlemagne’s relationship with the “Universal” Church when describing the church under the Grand Empire as “nearly the universality of Christendom.”36 But are Alexander, Caesar, Constantine, and Charlemagne the prime exemplars of “universal rulers” upon whom Napoleon modeled

1955), 239.
33 Correspondance de Napoléon I publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Volume XIX (Paris), 15894; see also Bonaparte, “Imperial Titles: Note, on the proposed inscriptions for the Arc de Triomphe - Schönbrunn, October 3, 1809” in Napoleon’s Letters, 217-218.
34 Gaspard Gourgaud, Sainte Hélène: Journal inédit de 1815 à 1818, Volume II (Paris: Michel Lévy; Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1858), 162; see also Bonaparte, The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words, 227.
35 Markham, 150.
36 “To the Comité ecclesiastique, 16 March 1811, Correspondance de Napoléon Ier, publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Volume XXI (Paris: PLon and Dumaine, 1858-70), 482; see also Bonaparte, The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words, 109-110.
himself once he became emperor?

Napoleon, who overcame incredible odds and obstacles to become emperor, stressed the notion of merit when awarding “great men” the Legion of Honor or Marshal’s baton. This policy falls in line with the Abbé de Saint-Pierre’s (1658-1743) belief that we should not...confuse the powerful man with the great man: power often comes either from birth or from different crossings of fortune, or, rather, from different external arrangements of Providence; but a man becomes great only by his internal qualities of mind and heart and the great benefits he bestows on society. The great men deserve our esteem, our praises, and our respect...The title of Great Man...is appropriate only to the great geniuses...  

Compare these words from the eighteenth century with what Napoleon said decades later: “A man, to be really great, no matter in what order of greatness, must have improvised a portion of his own glory, and shown himself superior to the event which he has brought about.” Napoleon also asserted, “Is it because they were lucky that great men become great? No, but being great, they have been able to master luck.” Is there more than just a convenient parallel between Saint-Pierre and Napoleon’s language?

How did all of the above change or evolve over the period from the mid-1780s until Napoleon’s death in 1821? Can evidence prove or substantially support change over time in his ideas, actions, or use of certain types of figures (republican ones, etc.)? What changed in his selection of great men over time? What are the ratios or percentages of non-military to military “great men” interred in the Panthéon under Napoleon?

37 Kelly, 22-23.
38 See the entry for July 20 in Bonaparte, The Napoleon Calendar: A Quotation from the Works and Sayings of Napoleon for Every Day in the Year.
39 Ernest Butner, The Mind of Napoleon on American Battlefields Discussion (accessed 26 May
Finally, considering the purely religious use of the term “cult” in the title of Jacques-Olivier Boudon’s *Napoléon et les Cultes: Les religions en Europe à l’aube du XIXᵉ siècle 1800-1815*, do we actually see the secular phrase “culte des grands hommes” used by Napoleon and his collaborators?

**The Cult of Great Men and Napoleon**

The Napoleonic cult of great men was part of an older tradition that involved the secularization of saints’ lives. The cult of great men is also indebted to a specific rhetorical form known as *oraison funèbre*, or funeral orations. The word “cult” has its origins in the Latin word *cultus*, which means “adoration.” As defined in Diderot and D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* and Émile Littré’s *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, “culte” as used by early modern Frenchmen pertained to the adoration of deities and/or saints in ancient and medieval times. Therefore, the concept of an eighteenth and nineteenth century cult of great men represents a secularization of a religious term.

Nevertheless, the particular phrase “cult of great men” was not generally used during the Revolutionary period. Bonnet never quotes anyone who used that phrase before the first recorded use of the expression is in Chateaubriand’s *Mémoires d’outre-


\[\text{\textsuperscript{41}}\] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: \]
tombe (1848)\textsuperscript{42} and even there, he is referring to England: “this England, surrounded by its ships, covered by its herds and professing the cult of great men, was charming and frightening.”\textsuperscript{43} Only toward the end of the nineteenth century does the expression appear as a stand alone concept. All the same, even though this term is essentially an after-the-fact invention of historians, the phrase is helpful in describing the phenomenon under consideration here, because what we see with regard to great men does indeed parallel the behavior associated with the eighteenth century understanding of the term “cult.”

Under the Bourbons, both the state and private individuals moved from the older “adoration” of Christian saints to promote the “adoration” of French military heroes or generals such as Condé, Turenne, Luxembourg, and Saxe by commissioning many paintings and statues of these famous soldiers and honoring them in funeral orations.\textsuperscript{44} In 1747, La Font de Saint-Yenne described history painting as “an intellectual art” that “incites the viewer to imitation of…the virtuous and heroic actions of great men…”\textsuperscript{45} Following Protestant mercenary Marshal Maurice de Saxe’s death three years after Saint-Yenne made the above statement, a funeral oration presented Louis XV and Saxe as David and Jonathan and stressed “the glorious memory of his [Saxe’s] heroic actions” on
behalf of the kingdom of France.\textsuperscript{46} In this manner, the Bourbon kings’ propagandists tried to use the cult of great men to maintain their kings’ power.

During the Enlightenment, the cult shifted to philosophes such as Voltaire and Rousseau, who contributed to human learning. While the philosophes studied and wrote on the funeral practices of ancient Greeks,\textsuperscript{47} just six years after Napoleon’s birth, the Comte d’Angiviller began his project “for a series of paintings and sculptures of ‘great men’” from French national history in 1775. The work lasted from 1776 to 1787 and included such figures as Corneille, Gabriel, La Fontaine, Molé, Molière, Montesquieu, Pascal, Poussin, Racine, and Rollin—many of who actually contributed to more than just French history.\textsuperscript{48}

In the early stages of the Revolution, the cult consisted of such patriotic figures as the Comte de Mirabeau. At this moment in history, the French revolutionary government ordered that the neoclassical Église Sainte-Geneviève in Paris be converted into a Panthéon aux grands hommes. Whereas Augustus and Agrippa founded the original Pantheon in Rome in 27 B.C. to honor all the gods,\textsuperscript{49} the French revolutionaries first interred the moderate Mirabeau and then the philosophe Voltaire in a Pantheon that honored great men in 1791.\textsuperscript{50} During the subsequent Radical Revolution and Terror, the republican Committee of Public Safety disinterred the constitutional monarchist

\textsuperscript{46} Kelly, 60.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 266.
Mirabeau\footnote{The main reason that his remains were removed from the Panthéon in 1794 was due to the discovery, during Louis XVI’s trial, or Mirabeau’s secret dealings with the royal court.} from the Panthéon and instead supported a cult of the “martyrs of liberty.”\footnote{We also start to see other uses of “culte” during this era, from culte décadaire to Culte des adorateurs. Kelly, 288.} During this phase of the Revolution, “the old style ‘oraison funèbre’ (associated with Catholic burial) ebbed,”\footnote{Ibid., 247.} while the Republican precedent for attaching universalism to the cult of great men developed. As Siegfried Weichlein explains, while discussing Moral Universalism and Nationalism after 1800, “The Former Rhenish baron Anarcharsis Cloots had been known in France as the ‘orator of mankind’, as a ‘citoyen de l’humanité’ and—as a prominent anticleric—‘a personal enemy of God’.”\footnote{Cloots died by guillotine in 1794. Siegfried Weichlein, “Cosmopolitanism, Patriotism, Nationalism,” Unity and Diversity in European Culture C. 1800, ed. Tim Blanning and Hagen Schulze (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 96-97.} As France fought in the Wars of the Coalitions, when Napoleon entered the arena of history, the cult of the military hero returned,\footnote{Dwyer writes that “Individual members of the Convention, often skilled publicists themselves” dramatized “their own roles” and thereby “contributed further to the cult of the individual and the cult of the hero, leaving the way open to soldiers like Napoleon intent on promoting their own careers.” Dwyer, 382-384.} as evidenced by “the extravagant ceremonies memorializing the death of General Hoche in 1797.”\footnote{Kelly, 247.}

The leading historian of Napoleon’s images as military hero and savior is Philip G. Dwyer. He uses the works of David Bell, Jean-Claude Bonnet, and Annie Jourdan briefly to outline the development of the cult in the eighteenth century as presented above. It is the work of these four historians that I build from. Of the four, Jean-Claude Bonnet deserves credit as the scholar who renewed the interest in the cult of great men.
with his *Naissance du Panthéon: Essai sur le Culte des Grands Hommes* (1998). In this book, Bonnet demonstrates that the cult of great men existed as a paper Panthéon prior to the actual establishment of a building in Paris called the Panthéon. One of this book’s other main theses, which Dwyer repeats in his article, is that the eighteenth-century cult of “great men” was a secular conceit designed to take the place of Christian funeral orations. At the same time, *philosophes* cultivated the cult of great men to replace the old military notion of “glory” with one that stressed the contributions of men of letters and natural philosophers to secular “progress” and civil society. As the Revolution approached, and certainly during the Revolution, the cult continued to evolve, stressing patriotism more than individual contributions to learning.

The spiritual descendants of the *philosophes* such as Madame de Staël and Benjamin Constant held Bonnet’s view that Napoleon represented a remilitarization of the notion of “glory.” My research, however, challenges this part of Bonnet’s thesis by 1) examining exactly what Napoleon admired about the “heroes” he most respected and 2) considering the qualities of Napoleon’s contemporaries whom he honored as great men. In both cases, it was not only military prowess, but also aspects of their “universalism.” I define universalism here as involving aspects of great men that appealed to all humankind rather than peoples of one nationality, ethnicity, or religious persuasion. In this context, universalism concerns 1) scientists who worked to educate

---

57 Although George Armstrong Kelly preceded him, I describe Bonnet as “ushering in the renewed interest in the cult of great men,” rather than Kelly, because both Dwyer and Bell cite Bonnet multiple times in a manner that suggests influence/inspiration from Bonnet. In other words, Bonnet seems to have had much greater influence on the current scholarship than Kelly has, even though Kelly technically came first. I re-examined Bonnet’s endnotes. His sources are almost, if not, all French sources and I did not find
humanity and better the earth, rather than just benefit their state; 2) republicans who strove to spread the ideals of the Revolution through the creation of sister republics, rather than fostering only French patriotism; and 3) imperialists who supported policies that diminished religious and ethnic differences among their various subject peoples, rather than standing only for that which benefited certain people in the metropole. As Napoleon decreed in 1806, the purpose of the Church of Saint Geneviève (the Panthéon) would remain that “which it was given by the Constituent Assembly,” i.e. that it would be consecrated to the burial of Grand Dignitaries, Grand Officers of the Empire and Court, Senators, Grand Officers of the Legion of Honor, and, by virtue of our Special Decrees, of citizens, who in the profession of arms, or in that of administration and of letters, will have rendered eminent service…

Sources, Method, and Argument

Key secondary sources from my predecessors have proven valuable to my exploration of Napoleon’s interest in “great men” of Antiquity, The Middle Ages, and the Early Modern Era. Nevertheless, Bonnet’s work, which is less than ten years old, mentions Napoleon on a scant fourteen pages in a book that is 414 pages long. David

any citation of Kelly in these notes.

58 Napoleon Bonaparte, “Decree Regulating the Purpose of the Churches of Saint Denis and Saint Geneviève; February 20, 1806,” A Documentary Survey of Napoleonic France: A Supplement, ed. and trans. Eric A. Arnold (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 1996), 58. In the same decree, Napoleon also declared that the only festivals to be celebrated there would be The Feast of Saint Geneviève (January 3), the Feast of Saint Napoleon and the anniversary of the Concordat (August 15), All Hallows Eve, the anniversaries of the imperial Coronation and the Battle of Austerlitz (the first Sunday of December), and, of course, whenever a great man’s embalmed body “will be buried in the Church.”

59 Moreover, in the mostly unflattering opinion of James A. Leith, the book left something to be desired for a variety of the reasons. Leith criticizes Bonnet’s index and his claims involving the cult of great men’s role in removing the monarchy. See James A. Leith, “Review of Naissance du panthéon:
A. Bell’s *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800* (2003), the most notable work influenced in part by Bonnet’s book, includes a chapter on “the Canon of Great Frenchmen” and an index reference to the phrase “Cult of Great Men,” but only mentions Napoleon *four* times in 304 pages. As its title suggests, Bonnet’s book addresses only the “birth of the Panthéon” in which no leader interred more individuals than Napoleon, Bonnet thus falls short of delving deeply into the history this institution and the cult of great men associated with it. Bell similarly stops his story at the formation of the Consulate. Robert B. Holtman who divides his *The Napoleonic Revolution* (1967) into chapters named for Napoleon’s roles as “The Militarist and Map-Changer,” “The Lawgiver,” “The Financier and Economist,” “The Educator,” “The Propagandist,” and “The Catalyst of Nationalism,” hints at the multifaceted character of Napoleon and therefore intimates that the latter’s heroes could not be solely great generals. Nevertheless, the work is forty years old and a reexamination of these roles and the heroes who inspired him is warranted. In Annie Jourdan’s various and more recent writings, particularly *Napoléon: Héros, imperator, mécène*, she explores some of Napoleon’s roles as different kinds of “great men,” which is also part of my thesis. She argues “that Napoleon was more successful than the kings of France and other European

---

states in developing monumental projects” that presented himself as a hero, emperor, and patron. Her approach, however, is topical, not chronological and therefore does not focus on the evolution of Napoleon’s cult of great men and his perceived place among these men throughout his career. Her emphasis is more on Napoleon’s different roles in his self-presentation as a great man, than on the evolution of the cult over the course of Napoleon’s life. She also uses some different evidence than I use in my dissertation. Thus, we overlap in our interest in the topic of Napoleon and the cult of great men, but our presentation of the topic and selection of evidence differs. As the Napoleonic Era is usually treated as the sequel to (if not part of) the Revolutionary Period, a truer sequel to Bonnet and Bell’s work on the cult of great men in the Pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary periods contributes to a new exploration in French Revolutionary and Napoleonic historiography.

Contrary to what Bonnet and Bell argue, Napoleon did not merely return to the old cult of military heroes. Napoleon called himself an “artist” and a “philosopher.” Thus it should not surprise my reader to discover that Napoleon also considered artists and philosophers in addition to the “great captains” (the world’s greatest military leaders referred to as such in Napoleon’s memoirs) of history as members of the Napoleonic or

---

61 Holtman, 9.
65 According to Napoleon, “The principles of warfare are those which guided the great captains
Bonapartist cult of great men. Of course, military heroes retained a significant place in Napoleon’s cult of great men, but he admired them for a variety of reasons and did not limit his admiration to only French military heroes. As Napoleon explained regarding what he admired about Alexander the Great: “Alexander proved himself at once a great warrior, a great statesmen, [and] a great lawgiver.”

His appeals to specific great men from history evolved with the constantly changing circumstances of his career. At various times from 1796 through 1815, Napoleon recognized the achievements of great scientists, artists, generals, and on occasion even priests who toiled under his Consulate and then Grand Empire. His heroes included republicans and scientists. He also hoped to appropriate the aura of ancient, medieval, and early modern “great men,” as understood by Napoleon in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His use of these men’s ideas, examples, and images and his concept of where he fit in history evolved as his role from general to consul to emperor to ruler of various satellite states changed over his twenty-year career as the prime mover of western European political, religious, and cultural history. Thus, the organization of my dissertation is chronological rather than topical, dividing his career into a certain number of phases.

---

66 As quoted in comte Emmanuel de Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte Hélène (Paris: H. L. Delloye, 1840), 14 November 1816; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words, 58.
Following this introduction, I present chapters chronologically that address how and when Napoleon honored specific great men from the ancient, medieval, and early modern eras and what he admired about the nature and careers of these men. The list of his admired leaders is considerable and varied. Nevertheless, while it is interesting to read the details of his references, I do not simply enumerate them, but instead focus heavily on what he admired about the men he singled out.

After a brief chapter describing the eighteenth century cult of great men prior to Napoleon’s influence, the first chapter on Napoleon’s cult of great men covers what Napoleon read and therefore knew about the great men he came to esteem. This chapter

---

67 Depending on the particular moment in his career, some of the individuals directly mentioned by Napoleon as his republican, imperial, or royal predecessors include Alexander, Augustus, Caesar, Charlemagne, Charles V, Cincinnatus, Constantine, Demetrius, Diocletian, Duguesclin, Germanicus, Louis XIV, Philip the Fair, Philip II, Solomon, and William the Conqueror, among many others. Napoleon’s republican models were Cincinnatus and especially George Washington. Napoleon kept a bust of George Washington on his desk, said that he considered being a “crowned” French version of George Washington, and ordered an official day of mourning in France upon Washington’s death. Also, Napoleon’s initial title of Consul was based on the Roman title held by Caesar and Augustus. Moreover, imperator in ancient Roman times originally meant commander in chief rather than “emperor.” So, Napoleon, like Augustus, could claim to lead a republic, when having a seemingly non-republican title. When Napoleon became Emperor of the French in 1804, France was officially still a republic, even on coins for several years. People did not start seeing Empire Francais on coins and documents until around the marriage to Marie-Louise in 1809. That may seem strange, but Augustus, the traditional first emperor of Rome, similarly called himself “Princeps” and “restorer of the Republic.” So, to Napoleon, it was perfectly okay to be an emperor and rule a Republic, at least for a time. Also, the preceding footnotes are all sources of direct quotations from Napoleon himself found in his letters or even quote books. I only included people whom Napoleon himself directly mentioned and not parallels invented by other historians. The list could actually be maybe twice as long as what I already have, but I did not want to get too carried away. Napoleon Bonaparte, “Arch de Triomphe: Note - Saint-Cloud, May 14, 1806,” Napoleon's Letters, ed. J. M. Thompson (London: Prion Books, 1998), 218; Napoleon Bonaparte, “Imperial Titles: Note, on the proposed inscriptions for the Arc de Triomphe - Schönbrunn, October 3, 1809,” Napoleon's Letters, ed. J. M. Thompson (London: Prion Books, 1998), 217-218; Bonaparte, The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words, xxvii; Napoleon Bonaparte, “Water-works: To M. Cretet, Minister for Home Affairs - Madrid, December 21, 1808,” Napoleon's Letters, ed. J. M. Thompson (London: Prion Books, 1998), 218; M.J. Cohen and John Major, History in Quotations (London: Cassell, 2004), 529, 531-532, 536; Pieter Geyl, Napoleon For and Against (Oxford: Alden Press, 1949), 100-101, 141; Paul Johnson, Napoleon (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 2002), 94; Jean-Marie Leflon, “A Compromise for Mutual Advantage” in Napoleon and his Times: Selected Interpretations (Malabar: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1989), ed. Frank A. Kafka and James M. Laux, 76; Felix Markham, Napoleon (New
introduces The Young Napoleon before the Revolution’s cult of great men and his reading of history, as related to the cult of great men in the eighteenth century. In this chapter, I describe how before becoming a French officer, Napoleon had aspirations to achieve his father and Pasquale Paoli’s goals to liberate Corsica from France, but as he later lived in France as a student in French military schools, his heroes shifted from Paoli and his father (Carlo Buonaparte “the Magnificent”) to figures not connected with Corsican nationalism. In fact, as Napoleon became more and more familiar with Enlightened and Revolutionary ideas, his cult of great men expanded beyond exclusively first Corsican and then French heroes.

The fact that many of the men honored by Napoleon were not French is not surprising considering that from 1796 until Napoleon’s fall nearly twenty years later, he strove to expand the new French Republic and later French Empire’s influence beyond the old French Kingdom’s traditional borders, and increasingly thought of “French” as encompassing a much broader and less national meaning. A third chapter covers whether or not there was a Republican Napoleon from 1796 through 1804. During this phase, his cult of great men included a mixture of great men from the days of the Roman Republic

---

68 Discussing Napoleon’s early Corsican nationalism can still cause emotional reactions in France, as occurred at the Fourth International Napoleonic Congress held in Dinard, France in July 2006. On 13 July 2006, Jean-François Marchi presented a paper titled “Napoléon, Fils de La Revolution Corse.” General Michel Franceschi responded angrily during the presentation that Marchi should not be allowed to finish, arguing that Marchi was assassinating Napoleon’s character. Despite some tears from the audience, the heated exchange subsided eventually, although session chair William Chew definitely had his hands full! To say the least, I was happy that my presentation occurred on a different day. For more information on that conference, see “2005 Fourth INS Congress in Dinard a Great Success,” International Napoleonic Society (accessed 27 June 2008): http://www.napoleonicsociety.com/english/crdinard.htm.

as well as scientists and soldiers from contemporary republican France. Following his triumph in Italy in 1797, he became a member of the Academy of Sciences of the French Institute and commander of the Army of England.\textsuperscript{70} When preparing for the Egyptian expedition as commander of the Army of the Orient, Napoleon added himself to the list of great scientists (as a geometrician) accompanying the voyage, thereby naming himself among France’s most famous chemists, engineers, geographers, zoologists, botanists, physicians, mineralogists, and artists. The whole while, he did not forget to continue to connect himself and his army to history’s great soldiers.

A fourth chapter discusses The Imperial Napoleon from 1804 through 1815. During this phase, Napoleon transformed the French Republic into a Grand Empire that maintained some of the trappings of Roman Republicanism that persisted under the Roman Empire. He stated explicitly that he wanted the title of French citizen to be the most desired title on earth and outright compared the title of French citizen to that of Roman citizen.\textsuperscript{71} Napoleon also offered French senatorial seats to such figures as the Venetian doge. As Bell notes, “in the last years of the Empire, more than a third of Napoleon’s … Senate came from territories well outside France’s 1789 boundaries.”\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{70} Regarding my reference to the Napoleon as “commander of the Army of England,” after his victory in Italy, the Directory appointed him to command an army to invade England, called “the Army of England.” In 1798, he determined that such an invasion was unfeasible and instead pushed for an expedition to Egypt. Talleyrand also supported the idea of an Egyptian expedition instead of an invasion of Great Britain as being more practical. Thus, Napoleon instead became commander of the Army of the Orient, which he referred to as “a ‘wing of the Army of England,” and plans to invade England were effectively postponed.

\textsuperscript{71} In our own century, the possibility of French citizenship extending to German nationals is once again a reasonable likelihood. See John Leicester, “German, French leaders propose dual citizenship,” The Plain Dealer (Thursday, January 23, 2007).

\textsuperscript{72} David A. Bell, The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 105-106.
This development parallels others within the Grand Empire that pertain to the cult of great men. Of those Napoleon interred in the Panthéon, for example, not all were French military men. As with the “French” senate, the “great men” of the “French” Panthéon under Napoleon included civil servants and scientists in addition to military and even religious figures, several of whom came from outside of the Hexagon.73

As these figures suggest, for Napoleon, as was the case for his Enlightenment predecessors, although a “Catholic” emperor of the French, during his 1806-7 campaign against Prussia, a bulletin noted that

His Majesty received all of the Protestant and Calvinist clergy. There are more than 10,000 or 12,000 French refugees at Berlin, whose predecessors took refuge there in consequence of the Edict of Nantes. His Majesty told them that they had just rights to his protection, and that their privileges and their cult would be maintained. His Majesty advised them to concern themselves with their own affairs, to remain peaceable, and pay obedience and respect to Caesar.74

In 1809, Napoleon wrote,

Our Lord Jesus Christ, though born of the seed of David, wished for no temporal rule; on the contrary, he enjoyed obedience to Caesar in the regulation of worldly affairs. As We inherit Caesar’s power, so We are resolved to maintain the independence of Our throne.75

73 In total, the men interred in the Parisian Pantheon under the First Empire included a baron, a bishop, a chamberlain of Madame-Mère, a chief of ports and arsenals, a commander of artillery, a deputy of the Convention, a director of the Department of Highways, a medical doctor, a father of an officer mortally wounded at the battle of Essling, a father of two generals of the Empire, a financier, a great organizer of troops, a judge, a man of letters, a marquis, a marshal of the Empire, a mathematician, a mayor, a member of the Council of Ancients, a memorialist, an academician, a navigator, an aristocratic member of the Third Estate, an artillerist, a negotiator of the Concordat of 1801, a Papal legate, a philosopher, a poet, a prefect, a sailor, a ship-owner, a specialist in the institutions, a vice-admiral, four dukes, five soldiers, nine generals, one of the fathers of the Civil Code, seven senators, six politicians, the first leader of the Bank of France, the First Painter of the king in 1789, the last doge of Genoa, the master of the official painter of the Empire (Jacques-Louis David), the President of the Constituent Assembly at the beginning of the Revolution, thirty counts, three cardinals, two governors, four lawyers, two admirals, and two ministers.


75 Correspondance de Napoléon I, publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Volume XIX (Paris), 15518; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, “Encyclical to the French Bishops” in Napoleon’s Letters
The references are biblical: give unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s, and to God that which is God’s. The quote implies that religious figures should not aspire to power, and that in return will not interfere with their religious beliefs. In 1811, when Napoleon called a council of French, German, and Italian bishops, he appealed to the memory of a ruler of a revived Western Roman Empire:

The present epoch takes us back to the age of Charlemagne. All the kingdoms, principalities, and duchies which after the breaking up of his empire set themselves up as republics have now been restored under our laws. The Church of my Empire is the Church of the Occident and nearly the universality of Christendom.

What Napoleon admires about Charlemagne is that he nearly united all of Christendom, but also advocated religious tolerance in the name of political expediency. Napoleon explained later:

[As] I had restored them [Jews] to all their privileges, and made them equal to my other subjects, they must consider me like Solomon or Herod, to be the head of their nation, and my subjects as brethren of a tribe similar to theirs. . . . I wanted to establish a universal liberty of conscience and thought to make all men equal, whether Protestants, Catholics, Mohammedans, Deists, or others . . .

Here Napoleon is not really admiring Solomon or Herod. In the case of Herod, Napoleon is really admiring the religious policy of the Caesars, who delegated immediate authority over the Jews to a Jewish king. As Caesar, Charlemagne, Solomon, and Herod are but a

---


77 “To the Comité ecclésiastique, 16 March 1811,” Correspondance de Napoléon 1er, publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Volume XXI (Paris: Plon and Dumaine, 1858-70), 482; see also Bonaparte, The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words, 109-110.

78 Charlemagne hoped to marry Empress Irene of the East Roman Empire to reunite the West Roman Empire of the Franks with the East Roman Empire of the Byzantines, but the East Romans deposed Irene before she could accept the offer. Bourrienne actually mentions Empress Irene’s proposal to Charlemagne in Napoleon’s memoirs. See de Bourrienne, Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte, Volume 9 & 10, 73.
few of the political-religious leaders Napoleon admired and made reference to in both public and private documents, this chapter also discusses Napoleon’s mistaken identification of such figures as Charles V as a great leader to emulate when dealing with the papacy and in the context of Napoleon’s evolution from a Charlemagne to a Charles V to a never fully realized Constantine or Theodosius.

Napoleon continued to elaborate on his dreams of enacting grandiose religious and political policies in the manner of ancient and medieval leaders long after his reign as emperor ended in 1815. Thus, a fifth chapter covers The Defeated Napoleon from 1815 through 1821. This chapter, about the Napoleon of the Memorial of St. Helena, enables me to keep that source in its appropriate place while fully exploiting it. This important source represents the last phase and culmination of Napoleon’s efforts to fashion himself in the manner of a “great man” as well as his final verdict of himself and his place in history. As Napoleon wrote that “Greatness is nothing, if it is not lasting,”80 the exiled emperor actively worked to present a glorified version of his career that continued to connect him to the great men who preceded him and that would preserve for posterity a version of the Napoleonic Age that seemed a repeat of the semi-legendary times of Alexander and others. For example, a reflective Napoleon explained his Egyptian expedition by remarking,

What I like in Alexander the Great is not his campaigns, which we cannot understand, but his political methods. At thirty-three he left an immense and firmly established empire, which his generals partitioned among themselves. He possessed the art of winning the love of the nations he defeated. He was right in

80 See the entry for January 13 in The Napoleon Calendar: A Quotation from the Works and Sayings of Napoleon for Every Day in the Year compiled by A.S. Rappoport.
ordering the murder of Parmenion, who like a fool had objected to Alexander’s abandonment of Greek customs. It was most politic of him to go to Amon [to be proclaimed a god]: it was thus he conquered Egypt. If I had remained in the East, I probably would have founded an empire like Alexander by going on pilgrimage to Mecca, where I would have prayed and knelt.

Finally, following the chapter on The Defeated Napoleon, my Conclusion identifies and summarizes key points and themes related to Napoleon’s cult of great men as presented in all of the preceding chapters. This Conclusion focuses on how throughout his adulthood Napoleon manipulated gradually what Bonnet argues was a subversive cult of “great men” that drew attention away from the monarchs as the embodiment of greatness and instead placed that attention on their subjects as being the great men. Napoleon used the cult of great men to gain the support of his subjects by holding out the potential for them to be recognized as great, while progressively bringing the attention back to himself as he lui-même joined their ranks. In the first instance, as early as during his Republican phase, he used the cult of “great men” as a means of inspiring his soldiers and allies and winning their support. As covered in the chapter on The Imperial Napoleon, the many monuments erected to honor “great men” served as visual inspirational reminders of their achievements and what his subjects could aspire to achieve. The possibility of receiving the marshal’s baton or Legion of Honor medal encouraged his subjects, whether military or civilian, to work for such personal commendations, while at the same time benefiting their empire. In the second instance,

---

81 Napoleon learned from the Revolution that politics must absorb or take into account powerful cultural customs or movements, hence his incorporation of Revolutionary language and some ideological aspects into his own image.

82 As quoted in Gaspard Gourgaud, Sainte Hélène: Journal inédit de 1815 à 1818, Volume II (Paris: Flammarion, n.d.), 435-36; see also Bonaparte, The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written
by presenting himself in art and official documents as a military hero and a universal monarch, Napoleon began to engineer even during his reign a semi-legendary version of his career that put himself on the same level of the greatest of history’s men: Alexander, Caesar, Constantine, and Charlemagne. As such, the cult of “great men” did not undermine Napoleon’s reign by allowing for the potentially negative contrasts one might draw between “great men” of the past and contemporary leaders, but instead linked Napoleon to the great generals, law-givers, and statesmen of world history.  

Summary of the Argument

My focus in this study is on a particular aspect of the Napoleonic Era, rather than on the “age” itself. I discuss the Napoleonic cult of great men, including how those close to Napoleon understood this cult of great men and who they saw as its preeminent members. I analyze Napoleon’s use of the cult of great men from a perspective different from that of many other historians, such as those mentioned above. My dissertation is an intellectual history of Napoleon’s self-image as revealed by his activities involving the cult of great men. I analyze the development of his role in shaping the cult of great men from his youth, when he began to write about the great men

---

83 Such were his efforts in this regard that although plenty of people have reviled Napoleon throughout the past two centuries, an actual cult of Napoleon developed and has persisted as well. Multiple international Napoleonic organizations currently exist with thousands of members worldwide.

as a shaper of history, until his death, when he stopped actively publicizing and communicating his ideas. The subsequent chapters answer various questions posed earlier in this introduction by using a variety of sources. This dissertation therefore adds to our understanding of one of history’s most influential figures as well as his role in the development of the cult of great men by arguing three related points.

First, while military glory remained a significant aspect of what Napoleon revered about his heroes, it was nevertheless only one of several traits he identified as belonging to great men. The diverse Napoleonic cult of great men included first century Romans as well as eighteenth century Frenchmen and scientists as well as generals. While it may not be in contention that Napoleon did not confine his cult to a single ethnic group or profession and no notable historian may hold the contrary thesis, nevertheless, what I am propounding is part of my own thesis on Napoleon’s “universalism.” Thus, the cosmopolitanism or foreign origin of many of his heroes as well as the contemporaries whom he honored appealed greatly to Napoleon, who thought of himself as more than just a general and politician and who eventually reigned not only as Emperor of the French, but also as King of Italy, Protector of the Confederation of the Rhine, and Mediator of the Swiss Confederation.

Second, by interring great men in a Panthéon, placing great men within a Legion of Honor, leading soldiers nicknamed after Greek heroes, and linking himself to such great men as Alexander and Caesar, Napoleon owed much of his use of the cult of great

---

85 For example, Lieutenant Joseph Domingue (1761-1820), a black Cuban who fought with distinction for The Guides of Bonaparte at Arcole, earned the nickname “Hercules.” Roberto A. Scattolin, “By Order of the Commander-in-chief… The Origin of the Guides à cheval,” Member’s Bulletin of The
men to Greco-Roman precedents. This point is important to make, because it places Napoleon’s use of the cult of great men in a broad historical context. This point also relates to the larger thesis, that his cult of great men was not limited to military heroes just as the heroes of antiquity were not exclusively military figures. Moreover, this point has been insufficiently explored by historians. Napoleon’s interest in the cult of Greco-Roman Antiquity centered largely on such semi-legendary “great men” as Julius Caesar and Augustus, as well as someone admired by Caesar and Augustus: Alexander the Great. This interest merits greater attention by historians than has hitherto been the case.

As a modern Consul and then Emperor in the manner of a Caesar or Augustus, Napoleon emulated Roman leaders, publicly linked himself to Rome’s greatest leaders, and honored his loyal and successful subjects in such Romanesque ways as interring them in a Pantheon or entering them into a legion of honor. Napoleon respected Julius and Augustus Caesar, as well as many other figures from Roman and ancient history whom Napoleon would cite as precedents for himself in public documents and works of art. Moreover, he admired these men for political, military, and religious reasons.

A third key point that bears repeating is that Napoleon’s cult of “great men” extended beyond Antiquity and changed with circumstances. As he put it, “There are men who have strength enough of mind to change their characters, or at least to yield to

---

*Napoleonic Society of America* 82 (Summer/Fall, 2006): 3.

86 Recent work concerning Napoleon’s presentation of himself in the manner of an ancient emperor, the kind of great man with universal pretensions he emphasized during his imperial phase, is limited to such chapter-length essays as Valerie Huet’s “Napoleon I: a new Augustus?” in *Roman presences: receptions of Rome in European culture, 1789-1945* (1999) and “Crossing the Rubicon into Paris: Caesarian Comparisons from Napoleon to de Gaulle” in Maria Wyke’s edited volume on *Julius Caesar in Western Culture* (2006). To read a print-formatted version of this review, see Pamela Marin, “Review of *Julius Caesar in Western Culture*,” *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 01.45 (2007):
imperative circumstances.” Napoleon’s character changed from Corsican nationalist in the 1780s to revolutionary republican in the 1790s to Oriental dreamer while in Egypt to imperialist during his reign and finally to reflective commentator on these earlier phases in his life during his years of exile. The members of his cult of great men correspondingly changed with these distinctive phases of his life.

Analyzing Napoleon’s ever-changing personal cult of “great men,” and his recognition of contemporary “great men” who contributed to European or even human civilization and not just French civilization, is original on my part. While work does exist on the French cults of Greco-Roman antiquity and of “great men” prior to 1800, Napoleon appears only fleetingly in Bell, Bonnet, and Kelly’s discussions of the cult of great men. None of the bourgeoning historiography adequately takes Napoleon’s place in the story of this cult into perspective. My dissertation serves as a further exploration of the cult of great men, reasserting its place in Napoleonic and European history and recalling the alleged efforts of its members to “enlighten the earth.”


87 Napoleon Bonaparte, “September 15,” The Napoleon Calendar: A Quotation form the Works and Sayings of Napoleon for Every Day in the Year compiled by A. S. Rappoport.
Chapter 1: The Eighteenth Century Cult of Great Men

In 1999, Bruno Benoît described Napoleon as a man of the French Revolution, obsessed by history and comparisons with other great men, whether they were conquerors, legislators, or patrons. For Benoît, Napoleon’s goal was to enter the Pantheon of humanity through public visual representations. His “obsession” with the history of a diverse pantheon of great men had its origins well before he even left his mother’s womb as various predecessors and contemporaries developed the cult of great men that he would eventually influence and join.

This chapter concerns the Eighteenth Century Cult of Great Men before and during Napoleon’s formative years by synthesizing and summarizing the work of Bonnet, Bell, and others. It examines this cult when Napoleon had no influence on its development. The eighteenth century cult of great men consisted of an evolving and diverse pantheon whose composition occurred in three main phases: an Old Regime Cult of Great Men in the early eighteenth century, an Enlightenment Cult of Great Men in the mid-eighteenth century, and the French Revolutionary Cult of Great Men in the late-

---

88 “En tant qu’homme de la Révolution, Napoléon est obsédé par l’histoire, par la comparison avec d’autres grands hommes, qu’ils soient conquérants, législateurs ou mécènes. Son but étant d’entrer au Panthéon de l’humanité, il n’a eu de cesse, pour cela, de soigner son image de héros, de multiplier les représentations visuelles, celles qui occupent le plus large espace possible et qui touchent le public le plus nombreux,” wrote Bruno Benoit, “Revue de Napoléon. Héros, imperator, mécène,” Cahiers d’histoire, numéro 1999-2.
eighteenth century. As with many movements in history, these three distinctive cults of
great men occasionally overlapped with each other and are therefore not easily marked
off by definitive dates. Moreover, this amorphous cult of great men did not enjoy
universal support or enthusiasm among the French population. The royalist author of a
treatise on the universality of the French language (1784), Antoine de Rivarol (1753-
1801), ridiculed all the heroes of the French Revolution in a Petit Almanach de nos
grands hommes pour 1788. Rivarol, along with Louis René Quentin de Richebourg de
Champcenetz (1759-1794), mocked such revolutionaries as Jean-Louis Carra (1742-
1794), Jean-Marie Collot d’Herbois (1749-1796), Lucie-Simplice-Camille-Benoît
Desmoulins (1760-1794), Philippe-François-Nazaire Fabre d’Eglantine (1750-1794),
Antoine-Joseph Gorsas (1752-1793), Pierre Louis Manuel (1751-1793), Louis-Sébastien
Mercier (1740-1814), and Nicolas-Edme Restif de la Bretonne (1734-1806). Ironically,
Champcenetz died by the guillotine but six years after the almanac’s publication and in
the same year as some of those he ridiculed: all those listed above died in 1794, while
Rivarol ended his days several years later in Berlin.

Rivarol was not really mocking the cult of great men here, although it is true that
these revolutionaries were honored as great men during certain moments of the
Revolution. Rather Champcenetz was presupposing the validity of the concept of real
“great men,” which tells us something important about the cult’s significance and
changing nature already in 1784. In what follows I identify several general trends and

90 Robert Darnton, “The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature in Pre-Revolutionary
shifts in the eighteenth century cult of great men. I differentiate among an Old Regime
cult that focused on monarchic power and glory, an enlightened cult that concentrated
more on *philosophes* who contributed to humanity, and finally a revolutionary cult that
emphasized patriotism and republicanism. Ultimately, all three will have changing
degrees of influence on the respective phases of Napoleon’s career as he at times
identified himself as a monarch (when Emperor of the French and King of Italy), a
philosopher (when he outright referred to himself as “a philosopher”), and a republican
(when he commanded armies of the French Republic).

**The Old Regime Cult of Great Men**

Early in the eighteenth century, the cult of great men was essentially a
continuation of the medieval cult of saints and of kings. The emphasis on French kings
was especially prominent at this time. In 1732, the biographer Évrard Titon du Tillet
(1677-1762) wrote that

one would count few of these great men since the reigns of Caesar and Augustus!
One would believe that nature would have rested more than seventeen hundred
years to make a similar wonder, and to give the reign of Louis the Great the
admiration of every century.\(^91\)

---

\(^91\) The block quotation is my translation. The original quotation reads: “Qu’on compterait peu de
ces grands hommes depuis le règne de César et d’Auguste! On croirait que la nature se serait reposée plus
de dix-sept cents ans pour faire un pareil prodige, et rendre le règne de Louis le Grand l’admiration de tous
les siècles.” See Faith Evelyn Beasley, *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-century France:*
Using the first Roman emperors as the measure of greatness, Tillet regarded King Louis XIV of France as having ushered in a new era of greatness.

What was unusual or distinctive in Tillet is that in his *Le Parnasse français* (1708-1755), a reference to the Greek Mount Parnassus, he took the use of ancient precedents beyond focusing on just great kings and military leaders to include great men of culture. Thus, notably absent from the mountain are such prominent ministers as Jean-Baptiste Colbert Le Nord (1619-1683) and such prominent generals as Vicomte Henri de la Tour d’Auvergne de Turenne (1611-1675). Tillet instead identified nine literary and musical geniuses as the male Muses of Louis XIV’s *grand siècle*: Chapelle, Corneille, Despréaux, La Fontaine, Lulli, Molière, Racine, Racan, and Segrais. While Tillet hoped to spend nearly two million *livres* for a physical monument, the extravagant expense forced him to only succeed at providing a published description of his intended project. Although this work does foreshadow the later Enlightenment cult of great men in which Corneille, La Fontaine, Molière, and Racine would all return in prominent roles, Tillet still placed Louis XIV on the summit of his envisioned mountain where the “sun king” would preside in the guise of Apollo, Greek god of the sun but also of the arts. If the cult of great men developed from a Christian cult of saints, then Tillet’s work is a fascinating revelation of how dramatically times changed when the cult of a king and his associated writers and composers used pagan symbolism.

Under the mid-eighteenth century Bourbons, in an era of renewed fighting during the Second Hundred Years’ War (1689-1815), both the state and private individuals
moved further from the older “adoration” of Christian saints to promote the “adoration” of French military heroes or generals such as Condé, Turenne, Luxembourg, and Saxe by commissioning “many paintings and statues” of these famous soldiers and honoring them in funeral orations.93 Whereas France enjoyed two decades of relative peace in the 1720s and 1730s when Tillet conceived his largely unfinished projects, France was caught up in the War of the Austrian Succession (1742-1748) in the 1740s, and the cult of great men changed accordingly, focusing now on pro-Bourbon monarchy military heroes. Not surprisingly, in 1747, La Font de Saint-Yenne described history painting as “an intellectual art” that “incites the viewer to imitation of…the virtuous and heroic actions of great men…”94

Following German-born Protestant mercenary and Marshal General of France Maurice de Saxe’s death three years after Saint-Yenne made the above statement, from 1756 to 1776 a Mausolée du Maréchal de Saxe, considered by Bonnet a masterpiece of eighteenth century sculpture, was conceived in Paris and ultimately placed in the temple Saint-Thomas in Strasbourg.95 Meanwhile, a funeral oration presented Louis XV and Saxe as David and Jonathan, heroic figures of the ancient Kingdom of Israel, and stressed “the glorious memory of his [Saxe’s] heroic actions” on behalf of the kingdom of France.96 From 1758, during a difficult moment in the Seven Years’ War, to 1790, the Académie Française held an eloquence competition that focused on eulogies with the first

92 Ibid., 250.
94 See Prendergast, 65.
95 Bonnet, 120.
winner being one on Saxe. Sixty-nine percent of these eulogies concerned such servants of the monarchy as d’Aguesseau, Catinat, Colbert, Duguay-Trouin, Montausier, and Sully, all of whom were praised for in fact their devotion to their sovereigns. Two such sovereigns, Kings Charles V the Wise and Louis XII, also received eulogies. Eighteenth-century Frenchmen regarded Charles V as a philosopher-monarch who followed the example of Erasmus. Louis XII’s virtues included solicitude for his subjects, while his admirers also praised him for being a “father of the people” who prefigured the Enlightenment. In all these ways, the Bourbon kings’ propagandists tried to use the cult of great men whether men of culture, military heroes, or statesmen to maintain their kings’ power.

The efforts to glorify the memory of those who labored on behalf of the kingdom of France generated support for the government and also helped develop a new French patriotism and nationalism, but it did not brak entirely with the trend of looking back to ancient models. As late as 1770, the thoroughly enlightened Lefebvre de Beauvray wrote in his Social and Patriotic Dictionary that Frenchmen should emulate the “great actions of the Greeks and Romans…” In 1771, the painter Jean-Bernard Restout wrote that great “men ‘need only have devoted their talents to France to have the right to our

96 Kelly, 60.
98 Bonnet, 72.
99 Ibid., 93, 145.
100 Ibid., 35.
101 Ibid., 47, 106.
102 Bell, 122.
gratitude.” As David Bell argues, the celebration of great French patriots “redounded on” the king, “increasing his stature and historical reputation” by “putting him on a level with Roman emperors.” The next phase of the history of the cult of great men would have a different emphasis.

The Enlightenment Cult of Great Men

In the mid-1770s, during the Enlightenment and after Louis XV’s disastrous defeat in the Seven Years’ War, the cult shifted to philosophers such as Voltaire and Rousseau, who contributed to human learning. While the philosophes studied and wrote on the funeral practices of ancient Greeks, D’Alembert and Condorcet composed secular eulogies reminiscent of ancient panegyrics for the Académie française that praised such towering figures of learning as the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, Fontenelle, and Montesquieu. Descartes and Vauban also received eulogies during the Enlightenment. Jacques-Louis David’s pre-Revolution paintings depicted intellectuals from antiquity (The Death of Socrates) and his own century and time (Portrait of Monsieur Lavoisier and his wife). That principal philosophes would concentrate on intellectuals as great men is consistent with their larger projects. Consider, for example,

103 Jean-Bernard Restout as quoted in Ibid., 121.
104 Ibid., 123.
106 Kelly, 266.
107 Ibid., 61-72.
108 Bonnet, 72.
d’Alembert’s *Preliminary Discourse* to the *Encyclopedia*, a project that lasted from 1751 to 1780, and the Tree of Knowledge for the kind of people who contributed to knowledge, i.e. the leading figures of the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as educators, musicians, authors, artists, artisans, architects, and more.\(^{109}\)

This tree of sciences, one of many such diagrams made by early modern philosophers,\(^ {110}\) shows the enlargement of the concept of great historical figures by revising its notion of “history” to emphasize the largely unknown inventors of most of the techniques for mastering nature and augmenting human commodity. These unknown heroes, presumably both civilian and obscure architects of clever and industrial use of nature, emerge as the real unsung heroes of history. Under “memory” are skills and conquests of nature required, redefined, and poised down under the subject of history. According to Robert Darnton, the encyclopédists, who in their own words emphasized “the great geniuses,” “the men of letters,” “and the philosophers” in the “history of man,”\(^ {111}\) in effect “cast the *philosophes* in a grand role.”\(^ {112}\) Great men who contributed to the particular branches on the encyclopedic tree of knowledge would also be recognized in other manners during the Enlightenment and again under Napoleon. Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne explains that “Bonaparte had at first conceived a vast system of


\(^{110}\) D’Alembert and Diderot looked to Francis Bacon and Ephraim Chambers as their primary sources of influence for this new tree of knowledge. Ibid., 194-195.

\(^{111}\) As quoted in ibid., 198.

\(^{112}\) Ibid., 199.
education, comprising above all the study of history, and those positive sciences, such as
geology and astronomy, which give the utmost degree of development to the human
mind.”

---

Figure 1. *The Tree of Diderot and d’Alembert* as reproduced in Robert Darnton’s *The
Great Cat Massacre And Other Episodes in French Cultural History (1984).  

Just six years after Napoleon’s birth, in 1775 the Comte d’Angiviller began his project “for a series of paintings and sculptures of ‘great men’” from French national history. Readers should refer back to this precedent when considering the ethnic or linguistic diversity of Napoleon’s nineteenth-century cult, which includes many of the men in d’Angiviller’s project and yet also includes many non-Frenchmen not considered by d’Angiviller and others as part of the eighteenth-century cult of great men. The project took d’Angiviller more than ten years to execute, from 1776 to 1787, and included such figures as the Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, the Marshal Nicolas Catinat, Prince Louis II de Bourbon le Grand Condé, Corneille, the Chancellor Henri François d’Aguesseau, René Descartes the Father of Modern Philosophy, Bertrand du Guesclin the Eagle of Brittany, the writer François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon, the architect Ange-Jacques Gabriel (1698-1782), the poet Jean de La Fontaine, the mathematician Marquis Guillaume François Antoine de l’Hôpital, the statesman Molé, Molière, the duc Charles de Sainte-Maure de Montausier, the Baron Charles-Louis de Secondat de La Brède et de Montesquieu, Pascal, the painter Nicolas Poussin who in the seventeenth century depicted great men in such paintings as *Discovery of Achilles on Skyros* (1649-1650), the dramatist Jean Racine (1639-1699), the historian and educator Charles Rollin (1661-1741), the Saint Vincent de Paul, Sully, the comte Anne Hilarion de

---

115 Andrew McClellan, “D’Angiviller’s ‘Great Men’ of France and the Politics of the Parlements,”
Costentin de Tourville, the Vicomte Henri de la Tour d’Auvergne de Turenne, and the Marquis Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban.\textsuperscript{116} While a number of these men were military figures, many of them actually contributed to more than just military history by inspiring and influencing legal documents and intellectual ideas.\textsuperscript{117} Indeed, a number of these figures arguably contributed to not just French military glory, but also to the branches of human understanding identified by Diderot and d’Alembert.

Practically all of these figures listed above would later surface in Napoleon’s ever changing cult of great men in some capacity. Both the Imperial and the Defeated Napoleon retained a lasting admiration for Corneille. In a conversation in the early 1800s, Napoleon boasted that he could appreciate him [Corneille] better than anybody else” and when in 1816 Napoleon said, “Great tragedy…is the school of great men,” he added that “France owes many of her finest deeds to Corneille. Indeed, gentlemen, had he still been living in my time, I would have made him a prince.”\textsuperscript{118} At about the same time, Napoleon also called Molière’s Tartuffe “the mark of a master. It is the masterpiece of an inimitable personality.”\textsuperscript{119} Bertrand du Guesclin, a French military commander

\textit{Art History} 13.2 (Jun90): 175-192.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 187-188.
\textsuperscript{119} Napoleon Bonaparte as quoted in Comte Emmanuel de Las Cases, \textit{Mémorial de Sainte Hélène} (Paris: H. L. Delloye, 1840), 19 August 1816.
during the Hundred Years’ War memorialized by Louis Foncou at the Salon of 1789, later joined Napoleon’s cult of great men when on 14 May 1806, Napoleon wrote that he wanted a fountain erected in Paris on which “William the Conqueror and Duguesclin may be given places of honour…” This choice reflects Napoleon’s attempts at anti-British propaganda during the imperial phase of his career. The Defeated Napoleon on St. Helena, no longer at war with Britain, praised Turenne not merely as a great general, but as someone “who possessed intellect and character.” Thus, we see that in many ways D’Angiviller’s *Grands Hommes* anticipated Napoleon’s later projects to honor some of the same great men, as would some of the subsequent efforts of the French revolutionaries.

**The French Revolutionary Cult of Great Men**

The French Revolution terminated D’Angiviller’s project prematurely. The last five statues planned for 1789 through 1793 were not executed. These statues would have honored the poet Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, the admiral Duguai-Trouin, the magistrate Guillaume de Lamoignon, the painter and art theorist Charles Lebrun (1619-1690), and the painter and sculptor Pierre Paul Puget (1620-1694). The revolutionaries would in

---

120 McClellan, 188.
123 McClellan, 186, 188.
short order undertake a new project to honor great men that continues to this day.

In the early stages of the Revolution, the cult consisted of such patriotic figures as the Comte de Mirabeau for whom on 8 February 1791 Napoleon suggested “The Patriotic Society should give a complete Corsican costume” with “cap, coat, breeches, cartridge-pouch, dagger, pistol and musket,”\textsuperscript{124} because Mirabeau sponsored Corsica’s candidacy as a French department. The revolutionary cult also continued to look to antiquity for its models as to how to honor great men and what traits made men great. During the early years of the Revolution, David painted defiant, usually martyred republican heroes from antiquity and his times in such works as \textit{Oath of the Horatii} (1784), \textit{The Lictors Bring to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons} (1789),\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Oath of the Tennis Court} (1791), and \textit{The Death of Marat} (1793).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure2.png}
\caption{Jacques-Louis David’s painting of the \textit{Oath of the Horatii} (left) and sketch of the \textit{Oath of the Tennis Court} (right).}
\end{figure}

Connecting the cult of great Frenchmen with a larger cult of great republicans was part of the revolutionary effort to universalize French civilization. David called on the “Peuples de l’univers” in his letter to the National Assembly on the significance of the Tennis Court Oath.\textsuperscript{126} In October 1792, the French interior minister Jean-Marie Roland, de la Platière (1734-1793) declared that “France must extend its glory through the ages and to all peoples: the national museum will embrace knowledge in all its manifold beauty and will be the admiration of the universe.”\textsuperscript{127} Such pretensions followed the Roman example established nearly two millennia earlier.

At this moment in history, the French revolutionary government looked to a particular Roman precedent when they ordered that the neoclassical Église Sainte-Geneviève in Paris be converted into a Panthéon aux grands hommes. Whereas Caesar Augustus and Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa founded the original Pantheon in Rome in 27 B.C.\textsuperscript{128} to honor all the gods,\textsuperscript{129} the French revolutionaries first interred the moderate Mirabeau and then the philosophe Voltaire in a Pantheon that honored great men in 1791.\textsuperscript{130} Before the complete collapse of the monarchy, Lambert de Belan argued in February 1792 for interring Louis XII and Henry IV, and not Charles V, as the only two

\textsuperscript{125}McClellan, 186.
\textsuperscript{126}Prendergast, 64.
\textsuperscript{128}This original Pantheon suffered destruction by fire in 80 A.D. The current building in Rome dates from 125 A.D.
French kings who were fathers of the people.\textsuperscript{131} As the War of the First Coalition began and changed the course of the French Revolution, the revolutionaries next interred Nicolas-Joseph Beaurepaire (1740-1792) who died while defending Verdun. Subsequent developments in the French Revolution would continue to influence which heroes were interred in the Pantheon and which were apparently deemed no longer “great” men.

During the ensuing Radical Revolution and Terror, the republican Committee of Public Safety disinterred the constitutional monarchist Mirabeau from the Panthéon after the discovery of his secret correspondence with Louis XVI and instead supported a cult of the “martyrs of liberty.”\textsuperscript{132} Assassinated politicians, Louis Michel Le Peletier de Saint-Fargeau (1760-1793) and Jean-Paul Marat (1743-1793), as well as a general who died in combat, the Marquis Auguste Marie Henri Picot de Dampierre (1756-1793), were next to be interred in the Pantheon. Whereas the main reason that Mirabeau’s remains were removed from the Panthéon in 1794 was due to the discovery, during Louis XVI’s trial, of Mirabeau’s secret dealings with the royal court, the martyred Marquis de Saint-Fargeau owed a degree of his fame to being the rumored tie-breaking vote in Louis XVI’s condemnation to death by guillotine. We also start to see other uses of “culte” during this era, from \textit{culte décadaire} to \textit{Culte des adorateurs}.\textsuperscript{133} During this phase of the Revolution, “the old style ‘oraison funèbre’ (associated with Catholic burial) ebbed.”\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 269.
\textsuperscript{132} Kelly, 288.
\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Culte décadaire} (tenth-day religion) refers to using the \textit{décadi}, the tenth day of the week in the Revolutionary Calendar for a civil religion’s worship in place of traditional Christian Sunday worship. François Antoine Daubermesnil wrote on the \textit{Culte des Adorateurs} in 1795, while Jean-Baptiste Chemin-Dupontès wrote on the \textit{Culte des Adorateurs de Dieu et Amis des Hommes} in 1799. Both “cults” refer to the deistic Theophilanthropists. Ibid., 288.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 247.
while the Republican precedent for attaching universalism (by which I mean their service or appeal to humanity as opposed to one particular nation or state) to the cult of great men developed, especially as the tide in the French Revolutionary Wars turned from a France on the defensive to a France that invaded its neighbors to spread republican principles throughout Europe. As Siegfried Weichlein explains, while discussing Moral Universalism and Nationalism after 1800, “The Former Rhenish baron Anarcharsi Cloots had been known in France as the ‘orator of mankind’, as a ‘citoyen de l’humanité’ and—as a prominent anticleric—‘a personal enemy of God’.”¹³⁵ The enlightened, deist, and anti-Catholic aspect of this phase in the history of the cult great men allowed for the development of a Cult of Reason that united the cult of great men, the Patrie, and Liberty.¹³⁶

As France continued to fight in the Wars of the Coalitions, when Napoleon entered the arena of history, the cult of the military hero inevitably returned,¹³⁷ as evidenced by Napoleon’s Order of the Day of 9 May 1796 that eulogized “the brave General Laharpe” as a “truly republican general, beloved by his comrades in arms,” whose death received “the true regrets of the nation and the army.”¹³⁸ Another example was “the extravagant ceremonies memorializing the death of General Hoche in 1797.”¹³⁹

---

¹³⁷ Dwyer, 382-384.
¹³⁹ Kelly, 247.
Just as those memorializing the death of Saxe half a century earlier buttressed the monarchy by recognizing one of its servants, the ceremonies for Hoche should have theoretically done the same for the Directory. Instead, as Dwyer writes, when individual “members of the Convention, often skilled publicists themselves,” dramatized “their own roles,” they “contributed further to the cult of the individual and the cult of the hero, leaving the way open to soldiers like Napoleon intent on promoting their own careers.”

Indeed, by the end of the decade Napoleon assumed the role of the primary director of the French cult of great men.

**Preliminary Conclusions**

Throughout the eighteenth century, prominent Frenchmen recognized the deeds and careers of an ever-changing cult of great Frenchmen in a variety of manners. This cult, very much of a Renaissance thing, typically imitated ancient and especially Greco-Roman models. After all, the major literary influence on the eighteenth century cult of great men was André de Thevet’s sixteenth-century “influential updating of” Plutarch’s *Les vrais pourtraits et vies des hommes illustres*. The early modern French cult of great men therefore began as a literary pantheon in such publications as Gabriel Michel de la Rochemaillet’s *Portraits of the Illustrious Men Who Flourished in France from* .

---

140 Ibid., 247.
142 Bell, 108.
1500 to the Present (1600), a book that focused on “clerics, military leaders, statesmen, poets, and scholars.” By the mid-eighteenth century, the cult expanded beyond the written word to develop into statues and paintings that played a serious and significant role in French politics and even in the development of French nationalism. In addition to the more dispersed individual funeral “orations, odes, statues, paintings, engravings, and books” used to recognize specific great men, each of the three major pre-Napoleonic phases of the eighteenth century cult of great men can be identified with a particular elaborate project to memorialize the great men of French history. From Tillet’s unrealized Parnasse français that would have glorified the reign of Louis XIV to d’Angiviller’s incomplete Great Men of France series that “did not seek to glorify one reign or estate in society,” these projects set the stage for the realization of a Panthéon in Paris that under first the revolutionaries, then Napoleon would recognize the achievements of artistic, military, and political “heroes” alike.

The key developments of the eighteenth century cult of great men that would
influence Napoleon’s cult of great men include, according to Dwyer:

the emergence of a hero cult around various public figures in the years preceding the outbreak of Revolution, a phenomenon the revolutionaries put to good use in the hope of galvanizing public opinion in favor of the Republic; the debate about faction fighting within the French body-politic; the prolonged war of the First Coalition and the general desire for peace evident among the French public; and the consequent receptivity of the French to images of warrior heroes, and especially that projected by Napoleon as pacifier of Europe.¹⁴⁸

But as will be revealed in the coming chapters, Napoleon would not limit his images to those of pacifier. He would introduce the veneration of a variety of great men at different points in his career, including not just warrior heroes, but also artists, scientists, and politicians. De Thevet’s “updating of” Plutarch’s Les vrais pourtraits et vies des hommes illustres¹⁴⁹ also served as major text for the Young Napoleon before the Revolution and even after. As Rousseau and Vauvenargues did before him,°¹⁵⁰ Napoleon too read Plutarch’s The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans while at Brienne Military College in the early 1780s.¹⁵¹ So strong was that book’s influence on him and his contemporaries that even Jacques-Louis David’s The Emperor Napoleon in His Study at the Tuileries (1812) juxtaposes a volume of Plutarch’s Lives with the emperor of the French.

¹⁴⁷ McClellan, 177.
¹⁴⁸ Dwyer, 380.
¹⁴⁹ Bell, 108.
¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 108.
The path that led Napoleon to join the ranks of those great men described by Plutarch in antiquity and those honored by Évrard Titon du Tillet and the Comte d’Angiviller in the eighteenth century was paved by Napoleon’s great predecessors and their admirers. His storied journey down that path began well before he fought as a republican general or led his subjects as an emperor, all the while emphasizing an ever-evolving pantheon of heroes that ranged from monarchists to philosophers to revolutionaries. That journey, which began in his youth some years before the onset of the French Revolution, serves as the focus of our next chapter…

Figure 3. *The Emperor Napoleon in His Study at the Tuileries* (1812) by Jacques-Louis David. Plutarch’s tome is behind and to the side of Napoleon’s right foot.
Chapter 2: The Young Napoleon before the Republic

According to Henry Foljambe Hall, Napoleon divided his life into epochs, the first beginning with his birth and the second with “his departure for France in his tenth year in 1778.” Our story begins with this second epoch during which Napoleon read and thought about great men well before his military and political career began. He claims, for example, to have read Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s (1749-1832) *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) no less than seven times as a young man! The young Napoleon also read the Abbé Raynal’s *L’Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1770) and Mirabeau’s *Lettres de Cachet* (1782). While a student at Auxonne, Napoleon read Plato’s writings, Rollin’s work, and Mably’s *Observations sur l’histoire de France* (1765). At just fourteen years old, Napoleon discussed the Viscount de Turenne with a lady who acknowledged him as “a great man, but I would admire him more if he had not burned the Palatinate!” Napoleon asked, “What did that signify if it was necessary to his

---

In 1779, the nine-year-old Napoleon began his military education at Brienne-le-Château. The cadets at Brienne studied the writings of Cæsar, Cicero, Erasmus, Eutropius, Livy, Cornelius Nepos, Phædrus, Sallust, Vertot, and Virgil. While at Brienne Military School in the mid-1780s, where he also read Plutarch, Napoleon’s “favourite models were Leonidas and Dion, Curtius and Decius, Cato and Brutus. It is reported that one of his nicknames was ‘The Spartan,’ given to him on account of his admiration for that nation.” As a boy, barely into his teens, Napoleon commented on the great men of the past:

It is not, exactly the truth of the relation that I see in these books; what attaches me to these important writings, is the political knowledge they contain. Let the lofty deeds attributed to these illustrious men be true or false, that is nothing to me; I find in them great models to copy, if fortune and events should favour me. What is it to me, whether the portraits of an Alexander, a Sylla, a Caesar, a Charles the Twelfth, or a Cromwell be imaginary, or that a painter has flattered them? Are they not magnificent compositions, which a young man, full of courage and ambition, cannot sufficiently study? Whatever these giants of the human species may have been, I wish to be as mighty as history paints them; if it were possible, that fortune would at this present moment, place at my disposal the circumstances and means to imitate them, be assured, my friend, I would endeavour to surpass it.

Napoleon completed his studies at Brienne in 1784. Napoleon’s brother, Joseph, recalled that in 1786 when Napoleon returned to Corsica, he

---

155 Ibid., 21, 32.
156 Napoleon Bonaparte as quoted in Charles Doris, Secret Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte (London, 1815); see also Napoleon Bonaparte, The Opinions and Reflections of Napoleon, ed. Lewis Claflin Breed (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1926), 21.
158 Ibid., 58.
159 Napoleon Bonaparte as quoted in Mlle. R. D’Ancemont, The Historical and Unrevealed Memoirs of, etc (London, 1820); see also Napoleon Bonaparte, The Opinions and Reflections of Napoleon,
was at that time a passionate admirer of Rousseau, the inhabitant of an ideal
world, a lover of the great works of Corneille, of Racine, of Voltaire, which we
declared together every day. He had collected a large number of books, which
occupied a trunk larger than that which contained his clothes—the works of
Plutarch, of Plato, of Cicero, of Cornelius Nepos, of Livy, of Tacitus, all
translated into French besides the writings of Montaigne, of Montesquieu, and of
Raynal. I do not deny that he had also with him the poems of Ossian, but I deny
that he preferred them to Homer.¹⁶⁰

Thus, we see who Napoleon admired in the 1780s (Alexander, Caesar, Charles XII,
Corneille, Cromwell, Racine, Sylla, and Voltaire) and why (they presented Napoleon
with examples he would later seek to emulate). Notice as well how Napoleon as a
Corsican studying in France admired a Macedonian king who conquered Persia, Roman
statesmen and generals, a Swedish king, an English politician and regicide, as well as
playwrights and other writers. We will see such diversity in Napoleon’s personal
pantheon continue throughout his life.

Napoleon and the Cult of Corsican Heroes

Napoleon’s interest in Corsican history goes to at least 1784 when he requested a
copy of James Boswell’s *An Account of Corsica* from Napoleon’s father¹⁶¹ and 1786
when Napoleon asked for “the last two volumes of the *History of the Corsican Revolution*
by the Abbé Germanes” this time from Monsieur Paul Borde.¹⁶² In some of his earliest

---

¹⁶⁰ As quoted in Browning, 100.
¹⁶² Napoleon Bonaparte, “To Monsieur Paul Borde” (1786), as quoted in Mason, *Napoléon*
writings as a teenager, Napoleon bemoaned the lack of greatness in his contemporary Corsicans. We see, for example, in the following rather depressing excerpt from a manuscript of Napoleon’s in 1786 a yearning for better men that could offer some insight if not explanation into Napoleon’s later fascination with great men: “How far men have got away from nature! How cowardly they are, how vile and rampant! What shall I find in my country? My compatriots charged with chains, trembling as they kiss the hand of their oppressors!”\(^\text{163}\) In the context of the larger statement, when Napoleon points out how “far men have got away from nature” he is apparently referring to his contemporaries’—particularly in Corsica—lack of defiance in the face of loss of liberty and freedom. It is a telling indication of the times in which he wrote (The Enlightenment). After all, Napoleon wrote on Rousseau,\(^\text{164}\) author of an unfinished Constitutional Project for Corsica in 1765, at some length in the 1780s and referred to him as a “virtuous man.”\(^\text{165}\)

In April 1786, Napoleon wrote of many “illustrious patriots” and “avengers of humanity” who fought and died for Corsica against despotism: Colombano, Gafforio,

---


Paolo, Pompiliani, Rafaelli, Sampietro, and Zucci. Nevertheless, in the 1780s, the Corsican who had the most obvious place in a cult of great men was of course Filippo Antonio Pasquale di Paoli (1725-1807). In the same text in which Napoleon compared the patriotism of the Corsicans to that of the Romans, he also ranked Paoli “among the foremost men of modern Italy.” The celebrated physician Doctor Samuel Auguste André David Tissot (1728 - 1797) “mentioned Paoli in the same context as Caesar, Mahomet, and Cromwell” in a Treatise on the Health of Men of Letters. On 26 April 1786, Napoleon described Paoli as one of the bravest men of modern Italy. On 1 April 1787, Napoleon wrote to Dr. Tissot thanking him for his “glorious eulogy to” Corsica’s “beloved general” and complimenting Tissot for spending his “days in treating humanity,” noting that his “reputation has reached even into the mountains of Corsica” and describing “the respect I have for your works…” By 12 June 1789, Napoleon wrote directly to General Pasquale Paoli as a Corsican patriot. As Dwyer explains, Napoleon found inspiration from “his adolescent idol, and leader of the Corsican independence movement, Pasquale Paoli. He did so for a number of reasons, but essentially the young Napoleon” created “an image of what he believed he could or ought

166 Napoleon Bonaparte, Napoleon: Manuscrits inédits, 1786-1791 publiés d’après les originaux autographes par Frédéric Masson et Guido Biagi, 3-4; as quoted in Browning, 279.
167 Browning, 278.
168 As quoted in ibid., 277.
170 Napoleon Bonaparte, Napoleon: Manuscrits inédits, 1786-1791 publiés d’après les originaux autographes par Frédéric Masson et Guido Biagi, 1.
172 As quoted in F. Masson, Napoléon Inconnu, Vol. ii (Paris, 1895), 64; see also Napoleon
to become, fantasizing about doing one day what Paoli, and for that matter his father” never accomplished—“to liberate Corsica from the French,” and in the process “Napoleon projected onto Pasquale Paoli an idealized image of what he thought a freedom-fighter-cum-father-figure should be like” and also “projected on to the French people an idealized portrait of how he wanted to be perceived in political terms...”

Thus, for Dwyer, Napoleon’s early ideas about his father and Paoli as great contemporary men would have significant consequences for the later evolution of Napoleon’s cult of great men. Nevertheless, by the end of the decade, Napoleon would describe Paoli as a “bad copy” of Solon.

Let us consider this Corsican “pantheon” in Napoleon’s formative years further, as Napoleon even thought for a brief moment that he might become a historian of Corsica! To that end, he wrote a short history of Corsica for the Abbé Raynal in 1789 in which we see the beginnings of Napoleon’s admiration of great men for their Republican universalism, i.e. that their causes should appeal to humanity in general rather than just their particular nationalities:

What can an enlightened reader find to interest him in this confused scene of affliction? But then a William Tell appears, and our hopes are centred on this avenger of nations. The picture of America ravished by brigands, and by the power of the sword, inspires a detestation of the human race; but we share the labours of a Washington, we enjoy his triumphs, we follow his 2,000 leagues’ march; for his

Bonaparte, *Napoleon’s Letters*, 4-5.

Dwyer, 402-403.


Ibid., 33.

Washington will remain one of Napoleon’s heroes at least into the Consular period as we shall see in the next chapter on The Republican Napoleon.
cause is that of the human race.\textsuperscript{177}

That neither Washington nor Napoleon would abolish slavery limited their commitment to the cause of humanity to that of the republics (irrespective of Haiti!). All the same, in the above passage, Napoleon simultaneously depicts himself and Raynal as “enlightened” readers while characterizing patriotic and revolutionary figures as universalists fighting for mankind.

At this phase in Napoleon’s life, the cause of the Corsicans was comparable to that of the Swiss in the fourteenth century and of the Americans in the eighteenth century. All three causes needed a great man as a leader to effect their liberation and in his opinion all three were not merely about one people’s independence, but about humankind’s freedom. At the onset of this lengthy letter, Napoleon even addressed Raynal as “A friend of free men, you are interested in the fate of your beloved Corsica.”\textsuperscript{178} In a second letter to Raynal, Napoleon wrote that Corsicans “arrived” in the Middle Ages and singled out its first writer, Giovanni della Grossa in 1470, as indicative of this arrival. In that same letter, Napoleon referred to Judge Sinucello della Rocca (1221-1306) as not just a “great man,” but also as a calm, courageous, impartial, humane, and just man who was “one of a small number of men that nature has thrown on the earth to astonish.”\textsuperscript{179} Napoleon went on to see fifteenth century Vincentello d’Istria, the first native viceroy of Corsica, as “meriting one of the first places among the great men who

\textsuperscript{177} Napoleon Bonaparte, “History of Corsica: To the Abbé Raynal” (1789) as quoted in F. Masson, \textit{Napoléon Inconnu}, Vol. ii (Paris, 1895), 127; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, \textit{Napoleon’s Letters}, 7-8.


\textsuperscript{179} My translation of Napoleon Bonaparte, “Lettre seconde,” \textit{Napoleon: Manuscrits inédits}, 1786-
governed the peoples” and as “meriting the esteem of nations.”\textsuperscript{180} That Napoleon would equate men of literature with patriotic glory or the attributes ascribed to Rocca as consistent with great men is also in harmony with an enlightened mind,\textsuperscript{181} because the \textit{philosophes} and revolutionaries who were Napoleon’s contemporaries similarly identified men of letters and proponents of freedom as “great.”

According to Lucien Bonaparte (1775-1840), Napoleon’s younger brother:

Raynal found that work so extremely remarkable, that he decided upon communicating it to Mirabeau, who, on returning the manuscript, wrote to Raynal that that little history appeared to him to announce a genius of the first order. The reply of Raynal accorded with the opinion of the great orator; and Napoleon was enchanted….These literary communications had strengthened the admiration of Napoleon for those two great men of genius. The death of Mirabeau afflicted him very sensibly.\textsuperscript{182}

Here though, Napoleon’s emphasis is on great Corsicans. How much had Napoleon changed when in 1817 he claimed that “of all the insults that have been leaped upon me in so many pamphlets, the one to which I was most sensitive was that of being called ‘the Corsican.’”\textsuperscript{183}

\textbf{Napoleon and the Cult of Ancient and Medieval Heroes}

Napoleon once asserted, “With my sword by my side, and the works of Homer in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{1791} \textit{publiés d’après les originaux autographes par Frédéric Masson et Guido Biagi}, 406-407, 412.
\item\textsuperscript{180} My translation of Ibid., 418.
\item\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 404-405.
\item\textsuperscript{182} Lucien Bonaparte, \textit{Memoirs of Lucien Bonaparte, (Prince of Canino.) Written by Himself. Part the First (From the year 1792 to the year 8 of the Republic.)} (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836), 39.
\item\textsuperscript{183} Napoleon Bonaparte, \textit{The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words}, 179.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
my pocket, I hope to push my way through the world.”  

Napoleon read both Homer and Virgil’s accounts of the Trojan War, preferring Homer as the more honest storyteller.  

Napoleon specifically makes references to “the Iliad,” and while a schoolboy at the Ecole militaire and also in young adulthood as a part-time soldier, Napoleon enthusiastically read about the actions and exploits of many noteworthy ancients, including Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, in histories by Plutarch and others.  

Indeed, at Brienne, Napoleon studied the lives and politics of Achilles, Alexander the Great, and Julius Caesar, and after graduating Napoleon continued to read, but now switching to works by James Boswell and Jean Jacques Rousseau.  

In the late 1780s, while at Auxonne, Napoleon took to offering explanations for why history’s great villains maintained their power and why history’s great commanders ultimately lost. He explained that the “government of a Caligula, a Claudius, a Nero, is possible because the class which is interested in supporting the government has been able to deprive the wretched people who are the victims of it, even of the desire to rid themselves of it.”  

Napoleon asserted that the “only reasons which caused Hannibal to fail and put an end to his brilliant success in Italy was the want of reinforcements.”  

As early as 1787, Napoleon wrote glowingly of Philip of Macedon, Alexander the

---

184 See the entry for August 16 in Napoleon Bonaparte, The Napoleon Calendar: A Quotation from the Works and Sayings of Napoleon for every Day in the Year compiled by Dr. A.S. Rappoport.  
185 Prendergast, 135.  
188 As quoted in Browning, 323.  
189 Ibid., 323.
Great, Charlemagne, and Machiavelli, while Napoleon continued to read and opine on works about and by these men, along with other great works of European history. In 1787 and again in 1789, while citing Plutarch as his primary source, Napoleon described Alexander, Brutus, Cato, Cincinnatus, Charlemagne, Condé, Curtius, Decius, Dion, Gaffori, Gaston d’Orléans, Inarus, Leonidas and the 300 Spartans, Machiavelli, Paoli, Philip, Plato, Robert d’Artois, and Turenne as “great,” “heroic,” “illustrious,” and “patriotic” men who “filled the world with wonder.” Napoleon also labeled Aristides the “wisest Athenian,” called Themistocles “the most ambitious,” and praised Cicero as “eloquent.” Two years later, in August 1789, when Napoleon wrote “Notes diverses tirés des observations sur l’histoire de France de l’abbé Mably,” Napoleon directly referred to Charlemagne as a “great man.” And in 1791, Napoleon described the brave Arnold von Winkelried “the Swiss Decius immortalized” at the battle of Sempach in 1386 and labeled Werner de Stauffach, Walter Furst, and Arnold Melchtal—three men who conspired for Swiss independence in the early fourteenth century—as “three celebrated patriots.” “Patriotism,” a term that dates to circa 1726, refers to love for or

190 Harold T. Parker, “Napoleon’s Youth and Rise to Power” in Napoleon and Europe (New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), edited by Philip G. Dwyer, 35.
191 Ibid., 36.
193 Napoleon Bonaparte, Napoleon: Manuscrits inédits, 1786-1791 publiés d’après les originaux autographes par Frédéric Masson et Guido Biagi, 26-28, 30, 139.
devotion to one’s country, whereas “nationalism,” a term that dates to 1746,\(^{197}\) refers to loyalty and devotion to a nation. A country is a place, whereas a nation is a people.

Thus, the young Napoleon shared his eighteenth-century contemporaries’ enthusiasm for great patriots. Many of the young Napoleon’s heroes before and at the beginning of the revolution were great men from antiquity and the middle ages who famously defended their countries through words and actions.

**Napoleon and the Cult of English Heroes, Part I**

Around the same time during the late 1780s and early 1790s, Napoleon also provided future historians with notes on English history made on the eve of the French Revolution. This source is helpful in demonstrating Napoleon’s youthful ideas of great Englishmen versus his placement of these figures in his cult of great men when the conquest of England appeared (at least to him) within his grasp.\(^ {198}\)

Henry Foljambe Hall, d’Éditions Littéraires et Artistiques, 1910), 478-479.


\(^{198}\) The volume used here is Henry Foljambe Hall’s 1905 English-language translation dedicated to “Frédéric Masson of the French Academy who, chief among historians of the French Empire has found the man.” See Napoleon Bonaparte, *Napoléon’s Notes on English History made on the Eve of the French Revolution, illustrated from Contemporary Historians and referenced from the findings of Later Research by Henry Foljambe Hall* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1905). Hall’s source is the rather rare Napoleon Bonaparte, *Napoléon inconnu; papiers inédits (1786-1793) pub. par Frédéric Masson et Guido Biagi, accompagnés de notes sur la jeunesse de Napoléon (1769-1793) par Frédéric Masson* (Paris: P. Ollendorff, 1895). Only one college or university in Ohio (Case Western Reserve University) has a copy of this tome, which is too fragile to send to other universities through OhioLINK, and only one seller on Amazon.com is currently selling a copy of it (for $1,437.50 no less!). Fortunately, Masson and Biagi published other editions of *Napoléon inconnu* in 1910 and 1912 under the title of *Napoléon: Manuscrits inédits (1786-1791)*, which are more readily accessible through library loan. As *Napoléon inconnu* covers more than just Napoleon’s notes on great Englishmen and because this section of my dissertation focuses specifically on
who also called Frédéric Masson “the greatest living Napoleonic student” and used the phrase “great men,” died while producing this English-language version of work written by “his great hero” Napoleon, a somewhat surprising description of a Napoleon by an Englishman who calls England “our country” and writes of “our shores” and “our kings.” Any English-speaking historian wanting to understand Napoleon’s opinions on great Englishmen at a critical stage in his development therefore owes Hall a good deal of gratitude.

Not only does Hall provide us with what Napoleon wrote about English history, Hall also discusses what Napoleon read about English history. Napoleon read the 1772 French edition of John Barrow’s *A New and Impartial History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Signing of Preliminaries of Peace, 1762*. Such works provided Napoleon with his understanding of particular great men and in this phase mainly Englishmen, which may seem surprising considering his later animosity toward England. As Peter M. Friedman explains, “Napoleon read everything he could about England,” because he “was fascinated by England’s military and political strategies.” He laid out his knowledge of English history in “Manuscrit XVIII—Notes sur l’histoire d’Angleterre depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu’a la paix de 1763.”

The great Englishmen whom Napoleon admired in this phase included Alfred the

---

199 Ibid., 5, 34.
200 Ibid., viii.
201 Ibid., xvii, 25.
202 Ibid., xix, 5, 13.
204 Napoleon Bonaparte, *Napoleon: Manuscrits inédits, 1786-1791 publiés d’après les originaux*
Great, Simon de Montfort, and Edgar the Peaceful. For Napoleon Lord Sidney was a “patriot” comparable to Brutus who toiled for “the good cause.” Napoleon shared and identified many similarities among these great men that he admired or similarities he thought he discerned between himself and them. Alfred, Alexander, Caesar, and Napoleon all had epilepsy, for example, but to Napoleon, Alfred the Great deserved his epithet for not just overcoming a physical malady, but for creating “a navy which kept down the Danes,” protecting “the country from their incursions,” restoring the English monarchy, and founding “their liberty.” So, monarchy is compatible with “liberty” in Napoleon’s view, because in this particular context Napoleon is referring here to a native English monarchy acceptable to and desired by its subjects as opposed to an imposed Viking monarchy of conquerors. Alfred the Great also made London the metropolis, and Napoleon would attempt to further aggrandize the existing French metropolis of Paris by spending 133.15 million francs on a variety of public works during the Consulate and Empire. Although Alfred did not actually found Oxford University in 882, the sources Napoleon read inaccurately made this false claim and he perpetuated it in his writing. This legend once again parallels Napoleon’s actual founding of the Imperial University of France in 1808—an institution that existed until 1896! Napoleon described Simon de...
Montfort, who died at the Battle of Evesham in 1265, as “one of the greatest Englishmen,” reflecting Napoleon’s interest in military heroes. On the other side of that coin, Napoleon devotes a good deal of text to King Edgar the Peaceful of England (943/4-975), a man called “that glorious king, that second Solomon” perhaps foreshadowing Napoleon’s later attempts to refer to himself as a new Solomon.

Napoleon claimed that he “knew men.” We also know which figures Napoleon at times wrote about harshly, but at others called his predecessors. Cromwell could be both “courageous” and “ridiculous.” The young Napoleon upon reading a life of Cromwell told his uncle Joseph Fesch that Cromwell the man was “incomplete.” Yet, Napoleon also read about Cromwell while at Brienne in the early 1780s and offered a more favorable opinion. With awe, Napoleon said Cromwell “was a man indeed! What genius, what boldness, what resources he possessed! How great, how fortunate, how dreaded he was!...I would willingly limit my existence to half its period, could I but resemble him for only one year!” Napoleon admired Cromwell’s luck, military prowess, and success—attributes that any hero under any government system could claim as traits that distinguish great men.

Revolution, illustrated from Contemporary Historians and referenced from the findings of Later Research by Henry Foljambe Hall, 35.
210 Ibid., 12, 56.
211 Napoleon Bonaparte, Napoleon’s Notes on English History made on the Eve of the French Revolution, illustrated from Contemporary Historians and referenced from the findings of Later Research by Henry Foljambe Hall, 38-39.
212 Ibid., 308.
213 Ibid., 14.
214 As quoted in Mlle. R. D’Ancemont, The Historical and Unrevealed Memoirs of, etc. (London, 1820); see also Napoleon Bonaparte, The Opinions and Reflections of Napoleon, ed. Lewis Claflin Breed (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1926), 24.
215 As quoted in Charles Doris, Secret Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte (London, 1815); see also
Conclusions - Napoleon and the Onset of the Revolution

Napoleon’s youthful experience with the cult of great men had significant influence on his later life. As Peter M. Friedman explains, Napoleon had no male role model as a child other than those he read about in history books….He loved to read history and geography; stories of kings and generals like Alexander the Great and Hannibal. He would take these men as his role models, using their tactics as models for his own.²¹⁶

During these formative years of his life, when Napoleon began to formulate his cult of great men and read about heroes from both sides of the Channel and across the Atlantic, his largely friendless and impoverished life was hardly that of a great man. It is no wonder then that in 1788, he would read and write of people seemingly greater than himself: Abbé Raynal, Alfred the Great, Ariosto, Buffon, Frederick the Great, Hannibal, Machiavelli, Mirabeau, Necker, Plato, Rousseau, Voltaire, Washington, William the Conqueror, and Xenophon—some of whom Napoleon referred to as “great princes.”²¹⁷

While the Crusades “had made the Pope virtually Emperor of Europe,” Henry II of England, described by Barrow as uniting “in himself all the great qualities of a politician, a general, and a legislator,” was seen as “the forerunner of the Emperor Charles V,” whose engagement with Mary Tudor, had France “been handed over to Henry for life

²¹⁷ Ibid., 28, 44.
after Pavia,” could have ensured “to Charles or his children the empire of the world.”

The young Napoleon as a junior artillery officer in the early years of the French Revolution wrote:

Ambition, which overturns states … which fattens on blood and crime, ambition which inspired Charles V [of Spain], Philip II [of Spain], Louis XIV [of France], is like all unbridled passions, a violent, irrational delirium which only ceases with life; just as a fire, fanned by a relentless blast, only dies out when there is nothing left to burn.

How ironic then that as an Emperor of the French, Napoleon would later cite Charles V’s sack of Rome, Philip II’s efforts to invade England, and Louis XIV’s political and religious policies as justification and precedents for Napoleon’s similar endeavors. Yes, for Napoleon, Louis XIV was “a great king,” but that should not suggest that Napoleon saw him as a “perfect king.” What he was, however, was a better king to Napoleon than the indecisive Louis XVI. Napoleon contrasted the two kings on 3 September 1789.

Two days later, Napoleon criticized “who first advised the king to assemble the Estates-General” as deserving “the name and fate of Prometheus” for “animating the monster, whose off-spring were to devour him.”

Nevertheless, Napoleon became caught up in the Revolutionary enthusiasm and

---


221 As quoted in Mlle. R. D’Ancemont, *The Historical and Unrevealed Memoirs of, etc.* (London, 1820); see also Napoleon Bonaparte, *The Opinions and Reflections of Napoleon*, ed. Lewis Claflin Breed (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1926), 35.

222 As quoted in Mlle. R. D’Ancemont, *The Historical and Unrevealed Memoirs of, etc.* (London,
saw an opportunity for his Corsican compatriots. While on Corsica in Autumn 1789 and
upon receiving word that Mirabeau’s proposal “that those Corsicans who had expatriated
themselves after having fought for liberty should be permitted to return to the island and
enjoy their rights as French citizens” had been decreed by the National Assembly, Napoleon hung a banner out of his window with the inscription: “Vive la nation! Vive Paoli! Vive Mirabeau!” In 1791, Napoleon wrote an essay in which he declared Paoli alongside and even above Lycurgus as history’s two greatest legislators in the same essay in which Napoleon goes on to ask his reader to stand “beneath some Roman monument,” and “your imagination will move in distant ages with Æmilius, Scipio, and Fabius…” In early 1791, Napoleon responded to General Comte Matteo Buttafuoco’s (1730-1803) attack on Paoli in the National Assembly by writing, “O Lameth! O Robespierre! O Pétion! O Volney! O Mirabeau! O Barnave! O Bailly! O Lafayette! this is the man who dares to set himself at your side…” Here Napoleon in effect lists those he considers the great figures of the Revolution as a contrast to a Corsican whom Napoleon detests. While Buttafuoco earned Napoleon’s scorn, Paoli and Mirabeau received consideration as comparable to ancient Greek and Roman politicians. For his

1820); see also Napoleon Bonaparte, The Opinions and Reflections of Napoleon, ed. Lewis Claflin Breed (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1926), 35.
223 Norwood Young, The Growth of Napoleon: A Study in Environmental (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, W., 1910), 214.
224 Browning, 122.
225 Ibid., 146.
226 Ibid., 148.
227 Buttafuoco, who worked with Choiseul for the sale of Corsica to France, served as Corsican deputy of the nobility in the Estates générales at Versailles and then to the National Assembly before sympathizing with the émigrés and a Corsican alliance with England. Clement Shorter, Napoleon in his Own Defence being a Reprint of Certain Letters written by Napoleon from St. Helena to Lady Clavering, and a reply by Theodore Hook (London: Cassell and Company, Limited, 1910), xviii.
part, Paoli said to Napoleon, “you have nothing modern in you and you do not belong to
this age; your feelings are those of a hero of Plutarch,” and to another about Napoleon
that he “has in him two Mariusses and a Sulla” and he was right! Obviously, Paoli did
not mean his comparisons as compliments.

As the Revolution progressed Napoleon also wrote (c. 1793) with disdain about
Carrier, Marat, and Robespierre whom Napoleon compared negatively with Cromwell,
Sylla, and Tiberius, because Napoleon regarded this sextet of men as a “butchering
set.” At this point in Napoleon’s life, he appeared hardly a republican or supporter of
republicans—positions he would have to change were he to rise under the auspices of a
French Republic.

228 Browning, 130.
229 As quoted in Browning, 210.
230 Ibid., 211.
231 Mlle. R. D’Ancemont, The Historical and Unrevealed Memoirs of, etc. (London, 1820); see
also Napoleon Bonaparte, The Opinions and Reflections of Napoleon, ed. Lewis Claflin Breed (Boston: The
Four Seas Company, 1926), 62. In the Discours de Lyon, Napoleon discussed Sulla, Marius, Nero,
Caligula, and Domitian in equally harsh terms. Napoleon Bonaparte, “Seconde partie,” Napoleon:
Manuscrits inédits, 1786-1791 publiés d’après les originaux autographes par Frédéric Masson et Guido
Chapter 3: The Republican Napoleon? (1792-1804)

In a somewhat fantastical scene towards the concluding half of Abel Gance’s classic 1927 silent film about Napoleon Bonaparte and the French Revolution, the ghost of murdered revolutionary Jean-Paul Marat beckons to an ascendant Napoleon, “What are your plans, Bonaparte?” The confident young general replies:

“The liberation of oppressed peoples, the fusion of great European interests, the suppression of frontiers…”

and…

“…THE UNIVERSAL REPUBLIC”

“Europe will become a single people, and anyone, wherever he travels, will always find himself in a common fatherland.”

“To achieve this sacred aim, many wars will be necessary, but I proclaim it here for posterity, victories will one day be won without cannon and without bayonet.”

Gance’s influential film, which pioneered a multitude of technical film-making innovations, also served as a significant example of pro-European propaganda that

\[ \text{References:} \]


233 In reality, as early as 1797, Napoleon mentioned knowing “full well that there is a handful of idle talkers . . . who want a universal republic.” In that letter, Napoleon went on to essentially assert his belief in the greater importance of action over words. See Napoleon Bonaparte, “To Villetard, 26 October 1797,” *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier, publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III*, Volume III (Paris: Plon and Dumaine, 1858-70), 400; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, *The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words*, ed. J. Christopher Herold (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 178.

234 Gance.
foreshadowed similar statements made by French political theorists like the famous pacifist Aristide Briand, French Prime Minister and author of *Memorandum on the organization of a system of European Federal Union*, and Edouard Herriot, who in 1931, a year after the publication of Briand’s proposal, presented his work titled *The United States of Europe*. In Gance’s film, which also refers to Napoleon as “Caesar,” we see the future emperor make this stirring declaration and then go on to conquer Italy beginning in 1796. The movie concludes on this triumphant episode in Napoleon’s early military career, almost as if Gance is suggesting that the Napoleonic dream ultimately prevails and perhaps further suggesting to Europeans in the aftermath of World War I that they must achieve peacefully what Napoleon nearly achieved militarily. But did this roseate picture of republican universalism in which Marat and Caesar serve as the finest examples of Napoleon’s heroes have any basis in historical reality? We will begin our story of the Republican Napoleon in 1795, when for the first time the path to political power in France opened.

**The Case for a Republican Napoleon**

As mentioned earlier, Napoleon had read about and became enamored with various great men prior to 1795-1796. In the early years of the Revolution, Napoleon described the stoics Brutus, Cato, and Thrasea as displaying shades “of the greatest of humans.”

---

235 Ibid.
In the same document, the *Discours de Lyon* (1791), Napoleon draws a contrast between on one side the moral, reasonable, and virtuous Catinat, Cincinnatus, and Fabricius and on the other side the ambitious, immoderate, and insatiable Alexander, Charles V, Cromwell, Louis XIV, and Philip II. Moreover, after Napoleon’s victory at Toulon in 1793 for which he earned the nickname “captain cannon,” he subsequently wrote a Jacobin pamphlet titled *Souper de Beaucaire*. Augustin Robespierre (1763-1794) referred to then citizen Bonaparte as a man “of transcendent merit.” Unfortunately, in 1794 during the Thermidorian Reaction, Napoleon spent time in prison for his association with the brother of the more notorious Maximilien François Marie Isidore de Robespierre the Incorruptible (1758-1794). A member of the Committee of Public Safety associated with the Terror, the elder Robespierre, much like Napoleon, read works by not just ancient Roman writers, but also Enlightened thinkers, including Montesquieu and Rousseau. With the executions of the Robespierre brothers, Napoleon “the giant of the century” would begin to dominate the fourth phase of the French Revolution, command all public authority, and directly use force.

Thus, in *The 13 Vendémiaire: Republican Coronation of Napoleon*, General Michel Franceschi asserts that from the event of 13 vendémiaire Year IV (5 October 1795), when

---


238 For the source of this quotation, see General Michel Franceschi, *The 13 Vendémiaire: Republican Coronation of Napoleon*, trans. Bernadette Wrkman (Biguglia: Pierre-Dominique-Sammarcelli Printing, 2007), 15-16.


240 Jean-Charles-Dominique Lacretelle, “Account of the 1795 Vendémiaire Uprising,” *Napoleon: Symbol for an Age, A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Rafe Blaufarb (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s,
Napoleon saved the republican revolutionary government from a pretty organized assault with the royalist national guard of many of these sections by ordering his forces to fire grapeshot at the royalists, “the indefectible alliance of Napoleon and the French people is born.” 241 Shortly after his success, Napoleon described the event by reflecting on “great men,” writing that great “men, like great fortunes, seldom emanate from a calm: in fact, we find that it is neither with honey in their mouths, nor silk gloves on their hands, that most of the privileged heroes have gained their renown.” 242 Thus, he sought allies who would help him continue his rise through hard mental and physical work. In that year, he also met his “incomparable Joséphine,” 243 Comte Paul François Jean Nicolas de Barras, 244 and Joachim Murat—three figures great each in his own right who played monumental roles in the Republican Napoleon’s rise. 245 Through his own efforts and with the help of his new friends, Napoleon earned for himself a new nickname, “General Vendémiaire,” to which he “replied: ‘I value the title of General Vendémiaire, it will be in the future my first title of glory!’” 246 Of course, for The Defeated Napoleon on St. Helena, however, “he came to see himself as a ‘superior man’” 247 only after achieving his victory at the Battle of Lodi on 10 May 1796. 247

240 Franceschi, The 13 Vendémiaire: Republican Coronation of Napoleon, 7.
241 Napoleon Bonaparte as quoted in Mlle. R. D’Ancemont, The Historical and Unrevealed Memoirs of, etc. (London, 1820); see also Napoleon Bonaparte, The Opinions and Reflections of Napoleon, ed. Lewis Claflin Breed (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1926), 74.
242 Ibid., 19.
244 Ibid., 29.
245 Franceschi, The 13 Vendémiaire: Republican Coronation of Napoleon, 23, 25.
246 Ibid., 29.
247 Markham, Napoleon for Dummies, 89.
From 1795 on, we see Napoleon looking to Greco-Roman precedents for what makes a republican great man, because during this phase of the Revolution, many revolutionaries referred to ancient, particular Roman, republicanism as their model. After all, by contrast, and Italian city-states aside, the Middle Ages hardly offered many shining examples of republicanism to emulate. In addition, Napoleon hoped to appeal to the nostalgia of Italians for their Roman ancestors. Thus, on 20 May 1796, Napoleon declared to the Army of Italy, that “we are friends to all peoples, and particularly to the descendants of Brutus, Scipio and the great men whom we have taken for models. To rebuild the Capitol and place in honour there the statues of the famous heroes…such will be the fruit of your victories.”

While it is dubious whether he ever really gave this famous speech to the army of Italy, the text does appear in the primary sources, i.e. his correspondences, and thus represents his use of great men as propaganda. On 23 October 1797, Napoleon provided us with a description of himself in the third-person that reveals further what he believed embodied a Republican great man:

From afar, his name gathered armies, innumerable legions under the flags of liberty and victory….With pride, intelligence, devotion and courage, the soldiers served as marksmen, gunners, captains, inspiring one another by their selfless ardor, thirst for glory, and enthusiasm for liberty….

Driven by love of study, which reveals love of glory, entirely occupied with refining the precious talents lavished upon him by nature, he contemplated his future. Calm in his obscure rank, he was full of his future greatness. He knew there

---

are men whose power has no limit other than their will. . . .

He threw himself into the arena like an Olympic athlete, to the applause of the enthusiastic onlookers. He promised to vanquish, and he triumphs. He flies like lightening and strikes like thunder. The rapidity of his movements prevents neither precision nor prudence. He is everywhere, sees everything. Like a shooting star illuminating the clouds, he appears simultaneously on the astonished banks of two distant rivers. Calmness, humanity, and moderation always dictate his conduct and join in his character courage, intrepidity, inflexible severity in maintaining military discipline, and dignity when he speaks or acts in the name of the Republic and its government. He is the envoy of the Grand Nation. . . . In one hand a sword, in the other an olive branch. 249

The above statement, which Napoleon probably wrote because it appeared in a newspaper (the *Courrier de l’Armée d’Italie*) that he published, reveals much about his vision of a Republican hero in the eighteenth century. Consider what Napoleon writes:

“Driven by love of study” like any Enlightened philosopher and thrown “into the arena like an Olympic athlete”, again referencing Greek Antiquity. 250 Even what Napoleon praises about his role as a general focuses not on tactical brilliance but on “courage” and “humanity.” 251 In another excerpt explaining his role in the first Italian campaign, he further describes himself as “a Cato,” a Roman republican statesman, with “spotless morality” as well as “a philosopher and a sage.” 252 Thus, an eighteenth century Republican hero unites in himself Antiquity and the Enlightenment, military prowess and discipline, severity, and “enthusiasm for liberty.” 253

From 1795/1796 through 1804, Napoleon’s cult of great men primarily included

---


250 Ibid., 38.

251 Ibid., 38.

252 Napoleon Buonaparte, *The Table Talk And Opinions Of Napoleon Buonaparte* (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1868), 8.

253 Napoleon Bonaparte, “Historical, Political, and Military Notes on the Army of Italy: October 72
scientists, statesmen, and soldiers from republican armies. While in Italy in 1796, Napoleon wrote that regarding Pavia the French republicans were not as inept as Francis I. The same day, Napoleon wrote a lengthy letter concerning the death of General Laharpe whom Napoleon praised as “brave,” a “true republican,” and “cherished by his brothers in arms.” Napoleon praised the artist Jacques-Pierre Tinet for his talents and patriotism and appointed him to oversee the confiscations of art. While a general in Milan, Bonaparte, expressed a view almost paralleling that of the French Roman Catholic constitutionalist and revolutionary Abbé Henri Grégoire (1750-1831). Grégoire shared Napoleon’s understanding of French culture and especially language as having a potentially supranational dimension. Grégoire “saw French as [not only] necessary to help create a unified national identity within the borders of France,” but also “as the world’s best language; he hoped it would eventually be adopted elsewhere as the language of liberty, fulfilling Leibnitz’s hopes for a universal language.” Napoleon wrote to the astronomer Oriana:

All men of genius, everyone distinguished in the republic of letters, is French, whatever his nationality. . . . Thought in Italy is free. Inquisition, intolerance, despots, are vanished. I invite scholars to meet and make proposals, what must be done to give science and the arts a new flowering.

Napoleon similarly exclaimed on 10 December 1797:

23, 1797,” 38.  
255 Ibid., 257.  
From the peace [of Campo Formio that ended the long history of the Venetian Republic!] you have just concluded dates the era of representative governments…. The two finest countries in Europe, formerly so renowned for the arts, the sciences, and the illustrious men whose cradle they were, see, with the greatest hopes, genius and freedom issuing from the tomb of their ancestors….As soon as the happiness of France is secured by the best organic laws, the whole of Europe will be free.  

In both selections, Napoleon regards Italy and France as linked by their great men’s contributions to the arts, sciences, and republican forms of government. He continued to expound on both military and scientific prowess as attributes of great men during the Italian campaign and after, saying that “General Berthier, whose distinguished abilities equal his patriotism and courage, is one of the pillars of the Republic and one of the most fervent defenders of liberty” and that

Citizen Monge, a member of the Commission of Science and the Arts, is celebrated alike for his patriotism and learning….New truths and new discoveries will contribute even more to the happiness of mankind; but it is essential that we should respect the scientists…

When Napoleon returned to Paris, he continued to talk of scientists in the Italian campaign as model citizens: “Citizen Moscati was known as one of the most celebrated of European medical men, with a deep knowledge of moral and political science….it is to him and his advice that we owe perhaps twenty thousand men who would otherwise have died in our hospitals in Italy.”

Following Napoleon’s triumph in Italy in 1797 where a newspaper he published

---

259 Napoleon Buonaparte, *The Table Talk And Opinions Of Napoleon Buonaparte* (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1868), 14.
(and possibly wrote) described him as throwing “himself into the arena like an Olympic athlete,” he became a member of the Academy of Sciences of the French Institute and wrote a rather remarkable letter to the Directory. On 10 October 1797, he wrote that it “remains for me only to return to the crowd, to return, like Cincinnatus, to the plough, and to give an example of respect for the magistrates and of hatred of military rule, which has destroyed so many republics.” Cincinnatus was a hero of Roman antiquity “chosen as dictator of the Republic in 458 BC when its survival was in doubt. He accomplished his rescue mission and then, after only 16 days, resigned power to return to his farm.” During the Revolution, Marat’s supporters associated him with Cincinnatus’s simplicity and integrity, while Madame de Staël identified her father as a new Cincinnatus for retiring. Thus, Napoleon’s reference to Cincinnatus was consistent with the Republican Revolutionaries’ inclusion of this particular dictator in their lists of idols. Considering Napoleon’s subsequent military career, did he really admire Cincinnatus and hope to imitate him, ironically relinquishing power? Napoleon’s actions suggest that he may have only used Cincinnatus’ example to appear humble to the Directory when perhaps actually following a different ancient Roman tradition: that of exhibiting reluctance for a power that Napoleon in reality desired. Instead of “allowing”

264 Ibid., 529.
265 Bonnet, 281.
266 Ibid., 333.
him to retire, the Directory appointed him commander of the Army of England.

In 1798, he determined that such an invasion was unfeasible and instead pushed for an expedition to Egypt. Talleyrand also supported the idea of an Egyptian expedition instead of an invasion of Great Britain as being more practical. Thus, Napoleon instead became commander of the Army of the Orient, which he referred to as “a ‘wing of the Army of England,” and plans to invade England were effectively postponed. When preparing for the Egyptian expedition as commander of the Army of the Orient, Napoleon added himself to the list of great scientists (as a geometer) accompanying the voyage, thereby naming himself among France’s most famous chemists, engineers, geographers, zoologists, botanists, physicians, mineralogists, and artists, who by 1798 would form the Institute of Egypt, which itself was “divided into four classes: Mathematics, Physics, Political-Economy, [and] Literature and Fine Arts.” He also compiled a field library or around three hundred volumes that included biographies of Condé, Frederick, Marlborough, Saxe, and Turenne and also the writings of Ariosto, Cook, Goethe, Homer, La Fontaine, Lesage, Marmontel, Montesquieu, Tasso, Vergil, and Voltaire. When in Alexandria, Napoleon ordered, regarding the “prominent men of” Egypt, that the “muftis alone will have the right to wear a tricolour shawl. But the Commander-in-Chief reserves the right to grant the same favour to sheiks and imams who are distinguished for their

---

267 Kelly, 277.
enlightenment, wisdom and virtue.”

The whole while, he did not forget to continue to connect himself and his army to history’s great soldiers. He inspired his troops setting out for Egypt by explaining that the “‘Roman legions that you have sometimes imitated but not yet equaled fought Carthage first on this same sea and then on the plains of Zama. … Soldiers, the eyes of Europe are upon you.’” In this allusion, Napoleon, then a French Republican general, does not yet refer publicly to Caesar, Augustus, or other emperors, but rather to the Republican Rome of the Scipios that bested Hannibal. Further, on 4 July 1798, Napoleon decreed that the “names of all the men of the French Army who were killed at the capture of Alexandria will be inscribed on Pompey’s column.”

Although Napoleon, like Pompey the Great, desired to conquer the East and dreamed of ultimately conquering the world, Napoleon felt special affinity with Caesar, who Napoleon praisingly noted had to fight courageous enemies. He took great risks in the adventures into which he was pushed by his boldness; his genius got him out of his difficulties. His battles in the Civil War - that’s what I call real battles, taking into account the enemies he had to fight as well as the qualities of their generals. He was a man whose genius and boldness were equally great.

---


273 A French report after the creation of the First Empire claimed that the Grand Army could reconquer Egypt. Ibid., 37.

274 As quoted in Gaspard Gourgaud, Sainte Hélène: Journal inédit de 1815 à 1818, Volume II (Paris: Flammarion, n.d.), 162; see also Bonaparte, The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words, 227.
Julius Caesar was an ambiguous character with respect to the Roman Republic, since he formally made his career under a republic and never officially abolished it. While the above selection is a later interpretation by Napoleon of his actions, evidence that Napoleon admired Caesar in 1798 and 1799 is more nebulous. In those years, Napoleon publicly refuted claims that he was a Caesar or Cromwell. While Napoleon does mention Alexander the Great by name during the Egyptian expedition, he refers more generally to the Romans rather than specifically to Caesar. Nevertheless, when Napoleon refers to Romans in Egypt, it is difficult to not infer that he had Caesar, who famously fought there, in mind, especially because his soldiers and officers do mention Cleopatra by name. Pompey would have been better—he who ended life defending the Republic. Napoleon offers no reason at this time as to why not Pompey instead of Caesar, although one might reasonably suggest that because Caesar won their war, Caesar would serve as the more logically inspirational model for an army seeking success. Moreover, we know Napoleon read about Caesar in Plutarch’s Lives and commented on Caesar while at Brienne in the 1780s well before 1798 and that Napoleon, as a reflective commentator on his own achievements, claimed to have much in common with Julius Caesar, who wrote a distinguished account of his own Gallic Wars. Like him, Napoleon hoped to create his own Mediterranean empire as a restoration of the Roman Empire, which would serve

276 While not an empire per se, the European Union shares the multinational nature of the Roman and Grand empires.
as the potential forerunner of an ideal universal civilization. While “Biblical and saints’ names...gave way to names recalling heroes of the ancient Roman republic (Brutus, Gracchus, Cornelia),” according to Paul Johnson, Napoleon, a republican hero before the creation of the French Empire, saw himself as a modern Caesar, i.e. a great politician, intellectual, and general all at once, and professed to wish to bring general happiness to all mankind.

Caesar was more than a writer and military leader. He was also a great politician. And so too was Napoleon, at least in his own opinion. Napoleon’s contemporaries likewise perceived Napoleon as fulfilling a Caesar-esque role in French politics. In Talleyrand’s memoirs, we learn that the Brumaire conspirator and Napoleon ally Renard St. Jean d’Angely “proposed that the French Republic should, like the Rome of old, be headed by two consuls, one of whom, in the course of time, might be converted into [a Caesar], and the other salute, a Caesar.” Of course, Napoleon ultimately agreed with the modification of this plan to include the addition of a third consul, who would assist the first consul after 1799. As First Consul, a revived Roman title, Napoleon boasted: “I am descended from the best type of Caesars, that which founds.”

Upon triumphing at the battle of Marengo, Napoleon declared the action “worth all the commentaries of

---


279 Johnson, 94.


281 This article also mentions Napoleon’s “desire to recapture Egypt.” J.M.P. McErlean, “Le Blocus Continental: A Historical Revision,” *First Empire: The International Magazine for the Napoleonic*
And when discussing the projected Légion d’Honneur on 14 May 1802 with Alexandre Berthier, First Consul Bonaparte again pointed to ancient republican examples when he exclaimed, “I defy you to show me a republic, ancient or modern, which did not have an honours system. You call them baubles? So be it, men are led by baubles!”

Thus, while holding a republican title of Consul that Caesar held long before him and by establishing a new “legion”, The Republican Napoleon connected himself and his supporters to the Caesarean version of the Roman Republic. He was only republican at this point in the sense of leading a republic and having to appear republican, i.e. republican in public spirit, but not in private mind. He had other ideas than what he said to assuage the concerns of republicans. After all, if he admired Caesar, then he of course knew that Julius Caesar changed Rome from an oligarchic republic to a dynastic empire. But to become a Caesar in the France of the Directory, or republican France, Napoleon would once again have to appeal to not just Roman, but also to more contemporary French Revolutionary heroes.

A French republican in 1795 tended to oppose monarchy and Christianity, looked upon republican Rome as the model system to follow, while supporting representative government and use of the military to achieve these republican ideals. Napoleon’s admiration of certain of his contemporaries reveals a number of things about his relation to the cult of great men and whether there was a Republican Napoleon. In the final

---


283 Napoleon, “First Citizen, 1799-1804,” *History in Quotations: Reflecting 5000 Years of World*
period in Napoleon’s Republican Phase (1799-1802), he looked to heroes associated with what we might call the Atlantic Revolutions, i.e. those that occurred in France, Haiti, and The United States of America during the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. Not surprisingly the French elements of this pantheon of Atlantic Revolutionary heroes were most prominent, because to secure power in France, he had to ally himself with some of the greatest French politicians of the day. Lucien Bonaparte (1775-1840), Pierre Roger Ducos (1747-1816), Joseph Fouché (1763-1820), Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès (1748-1836), and of course Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord (1754-1838) all conspired with Napoleon to create yet another republican government in revolutionary France, as the Directory proved unworkable due to its failure to adequately resolve financial, military, and religious crises and tensions. Napoleon aided by these allies seized control of France on 9 November 1799, a date more famously recorded as 18 Brumaire, Year VIII.

The event is significant because it brought Napoleon to the position of actually heading a state for the first time and typically serves as the dividing point between the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. As a Consular declaration on 15 December 1799 asserted, “The Revolution…is ended.”\textsuperscript{284} As part of 18\textsuperscript{th} Brumaire, Napoleon Bonaparte immediately identified new heroes. Just as when he distributed a sword to Sergeant Léon Aune, Napoleon called the recipient “the bravest grenadier in the army” and “a model for

the regiment” on 15 January 1800, Napoleon described Major-General Lefebvre who served and sustained wounds in various campaigns during the Revolutionary Wars as showing “much wisdom and attachment to the sacred principles of liberty, equality and the representative system as he showed courage and military ability” and thus should be made a senator on 28 March 1800. Napoleon similarly addressed the Council of Ancients on 18th Brumaire by referring to the “brave men under my orders” and the “brave men” who will execute “the Law that will save public order.” He next automatically placed any “citizen who had been a legislator, Director, leading magistrate or administrator, ambassador, general, etc.,” on a national list of notables. Finally, on 12 November 1799, when Napoleon visited the Hôtel des Invalides, he “asked that the church and the dome should be decorated with…antique statues ceded to France under the recent treaties. ‘It will be,’ he said, ‘the heroes’ Elysium and shed on them the most noble lustre.”

As Maurice Guerrini explains, “Homage to bravery inspired other measures: the old Hôtel des Invalides, the Elysium of Courage, was elevated to a Temple of Victory, was to be improved and become the sacred repository of martial trophies; swords of

---

honour were to be bestowed on soldiers who had performed outstanding feats of arms, anticipating the Legion of Honour.”290 From 1800 through 1801, Napoleon honored French heroes from both the monarchy and republic. On the foundation stone of the nation’s column on the Place de la Concorde “was placed a mahogany casket containing a number of commemorative medals, inscribed simply ‘Bonaparte First Consul, Cambacérès and Lebrun Second and Third Consuls.’”291 Such inscriptions appeared in many public buildings with such praise as “‘To Bonaparte, conqueror and peacemaker, a grateful country’.”292 Napoleon ordered a monument designed like an Egyptian temple to be erected in the Place des Victoires to the memory of Desaix and Kléber whose statues were placed beneath the monument, while Turenne’s remains “were transferred to the Temple of Mars from their temporary resting place in Lenoir’s Museum of French Monuments.”293

In 1799, before the coup, an anonymous Italian issued an address to the people of Italy that spoke directly to Napoleon: “We admired you in Egypt, we have seen you become in turn an enlightened scholar, a clever strategist, a prudent lawgiver, an experienced sailor, a well-informed diplomat and an excellent republican. What nation would not be proud to possess such a genius!”294 This aspiration seemed fulfilled when Napoleon became President of the Italian Republic in 1802. To paraphrase Owen

---

290 Ibid., 32.
291 Ibid., 67.
292 Ibid., 84.
293 Ibid., 69.
Chadwick, over time, Napoleon and his agents finished Milan’s cathedral, introduced French law, gave Jews equal rights, proclaimed toleration, excavated catacombs and the Roman forum, laid out gardens on the Pincian Hill, gave streets better lights, muzzled dogs, made nights safer, abolished sanctuaries, and repaired dilapidations of St. Peter’s Basilica.  

The Republican Napoleon of 1799-1802 proclaimed: “I belong to no coterie other than the great coterie of the French People.” Once he obtained power over this great coterie of French People, this modern Renaissance man and dictator continued to support great scientists, artists, and writers within his ever expanding republic. I associate admiration for scientists and writers with Republicanism, because whereas monarchists largely sought to glorify monarchs, republicans emphasized the achievements of great citizens. As First Consul, he said, “I am also a philosopher…” and gave “posts, honors, and subsidies to scientists, technologists, and industrialists, who in turn promoted” agricultural, industrial, medical, and scientific knowledge. With that mentality in mind, Napoleon also worked to place his contemporary great men in positions that would make the best use of their talents. These are “great men” in a different sense. As he explained, “The country possesses many clever men; what is required is to find them and to put them in their proper stations. One is at the plough who ought to be in the council,  

297 Chadwick, 484.
and another is minister who ought to be at the plough.” Napoleon would never abandon this belief. Napoleon actively pursued men of talents, even after he became emperor until the end of his reign, Napoleon won the allegiance of such distinguished artists as Jacques-Louis David who had earlier labored on behalf of the Revolution or Republic, and such eminent men of letters as Chateaubriand. Born of the ideas held by the reformers of the late eighteenth century (Condillac, Helvétius, and their circle), freed from the shackles of tradition by the bold destructive blows of the Revolution, channeled into creative teaching by the imaginative reforms of Pinel, Hallé, Thouret, and other professors at the new Paris “Health School,” enlivened by clinical conferences in the various hospitals, and enriched by laboratory work, the new French medicine made Paris the medical center of the world.

In January 1802, Napoleon gave medals to Grand Judge Regnier and councilors of state Portalis and Roederer. Napoleon made Italian archaeologist Ennio Quirino Visconti (1751-1818) Keeper of Antiquities at the Musée Napoléon in 1803. In 1804, “the chemist Claude Berthollet, who had organized the scientific part of the expedition to Egypt, became vice president of the Senate…” Thus, the great men honored by Napoleon under the consulate included a diverse group of authors, politicians, and scientists.

---

298 See the entry for November 15 in Napoleon Bonaparte, The Napoleon Calendar: A Quotation from the Works and Sayings of Napoleon for Every Day in the Year Compiled by Dr. A. S. Rappoport, ed. John McErlean (Mississauga: Poniard Publishing, 1996)
302 Guerrini, 94.
Beyond France’s European borders, the French Republic under the Consulate also included its far-flung colonies in the Caribbean. Napoleon Bonaparte took care, here too, to acknowledge great men, including Toussaint Louverture (1743-1803) who led enslaved Africans in the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804). Napoleon, whose views on race were contradictory, wrote to Louverture, as follows:

We respect you and wish to recognize and proclaim your great services to the French people. We owe it you and your brave blacks that their colors still fly over Saint-Domingue. Summoned by your talents and circumstances to supreme command, you ended civil war, halted persecution, and restored honor, religion, and the worship of God, source of all things.

That Napoleon’s cult of great men thus included non-whites is hardly the point. Louverture was a political force with whom Napoleon Bonaparte had to reckon. In 1801, Napoleon wrote in a confidential letter to General Leclerc for Leclerc to “negotiate with Toussaint and promise him all he desires in order to take possession of the strategic points and establish yourself in the country,” treat Toussaint’s generals like Dessalines well, flatter and treat well all blacks in positions of responsibility, and win over such others as Christophe by confirming and honoring their grades, ranks, and positions.

For his part, Toussaint wrote to Napoleon, “From the First of the Blacks to the First of

---

304 He did however appear to look negatively on white “women who prostituted themselves to negroes, whatever their rank…” See Napoleon Bonaparte, “Letter to Toussaint Louverture, 1802,” *Napoleon: Symbol for an Age, A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Rafe Blaufarb (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008), 164.


Aside from seeing in L’Ouverture, whom Napoleon also called “the first of your color to have attained such great power,” military, political, and religious greatness, Napoleon expressed admiration for a republican revolutionary hero of non-European ethnicity and in a colony many miles from Europe. This admiration hardly prevented Napoleon from reestablishing slavery there in 1802 when cooperation of the white-led French government with colonial blacks whom Napoleon regarded as part of the French Republic, but who for their part sought independence, broke down. At the same time Josephine pressured Napoleon to restore slavery in order to benefit her family’s sugar plantation, while Napoleon hoped to boost France’s colonial economy in the face of potential renewed hostilities with Britain.

The Napoleon Bonaparte of 1799-1802 also invoked great Anglo-American heroes, and sought to win their approval. On 10 March 1800, Napoleon, who had read Voltaire’s *Lettres philosophiques sur les Anglais* (1733) wrote of England as “the nation of Newton and Locke.” To showcase French manufacturing abroad, Napoleon held industrial expositions, forerunners to the universal expositions of the later nineteenth century and beyond, in 1801, 1802, and 1806 with the express goal of attracting British visitors. Charles James Fox of England visited the 1802 exposition and over “1,400

---

exhibitors displayed their wares” at the 1806 exposition.  

One final influence from across the Atlantic also appears in this “republican” phase of the Napoleonic cult of great men.  

Well before Napoleon’s downfall and exile, he wrote, in the third person, that he “loves the Americans,” “regards their prosperity and commerce as favorable to his policies,” and “will always regard everything that is capable of increasing the prosperity and of guaranteeing the welfare of that country as linked to his interests and to his most cherished desires,” while noting that the “independence of America is one of the chief glories of France.”  

Such praise and admiration for Americans focused on those known in the United States today as its Founding Fathers.  While Frenchmen like François Cabbarus wished for Napoleon Bonaparte to imitate George Washington in America by taking a presidential title, Napoleon rejected these proposals.  Nevertheless, on 7 February 1800, Napoleon ordered “ten days’ military mourning for the death of Washington—that ‘great man, who like the French, had fought for equality and liberty.’”  

In 1800, Napoleon met with Thomas

---


311 I am documenting an American influence by having identified many instances in Napoleon’s various writings from this phase in which he directly mentions great Americans as exemplars republican heroism and genius.

312 Napoleon Bonaparte, *The Mind of Napoleon*, 190.


315 As quoted in Dutchess D’Abrentes, *Memoirs of Napoleon* (New York, 1854); see also Napoleon Bonaparte, *The Opinions and Reflections of Napoleon*, ed. Lewis Claflin Breed (Boston: The
Paine (1737-1809), the British-born and American-lived author of *Common Sense* (1776) who was elected to the French National Assembly in 1792. Napoleon claimed that he “slept with a copy of *Rights of Man* under his pillow and went so far as to say to Paine that ‘a statue of gold should be erected to you in every city in the universe.’” Napoleon endorsed Thomas Jefferson’s nomination to the Class of Moral and Political Science of the National Institute in France in November 1801. In 1803, Napoleonic France sold Jeffersonian America the vast Louisiana territory, doubling the size of the United States of America. Perhaps this action too proves Napoleon’s admiration for the young American Republic.

Naturally, one may wonder what Jefferson’s reaction was to all these apparent gestures of good will. While in Pennsylvania in February 1800 Jefferson said to Samuel Adams, “My confidence has been placed in the head, not in the heart of Bonaparte. I hoped he would calculate truly the difference between the fame of a Washington and a Cromwell.” While in Washington in May 1807, Jefferson said to the Marquis de Lafayette, “Your emperor has done more splendid things, but he has never done one which will give happiness to so great a number of human beings as the ceding of Louisiana to the United States.” Finally, while in Monticello in March 1810, Thomas Jefferson described a potential scenario of ultimate Napoleonic conquest that in many

---

ways confirms what Napoleon discussed throughout his lifetime. Concerning the paths that Napoleon would likely follow, Jefferson wrote to John Langdon a vision of Napoleon as an abominable world conqueror:

Supposing him to have finished Spain and Portugal, he has yet England and Russia to subdue. The maxim of war was never sounder than in this case, not to leave an enemy in the rear; and especially where an insurrectionary flame is known to be under the embers, merely smothered, and ready to burst at every point. These two subdued (and surely the Anglomen will not think the conquest of England alone a short work), ancient Greece and Macedonia, the cradle of Alexander, his prototype, and Constantinople, the seat of empire for the world, would glitter more in his eye than our bleak mountains and rugged forests. Egypt, too, and the golden apples of Mauritania, have for more than half a century fixed the longing eyes of France; and with Syria, you know, he has an old affront to wipe out. Then come “Pontus and Galatia, Cappadocia, Aeolia and Bithynia,” the fine countries on the Euphrates and Tigris, the Oxus and Indus, and all beyond the Hypasis, which bounded the glories of his Macedonian rival; with the invitations of his new British subjects on the banks of the Ganges, whom, after receiving under his protection the mother country, he cannot refuse to visit. 320

Even Jefferson compared Napoleon with “his Macedonian rival,” seeing his republican claims to love freedom as so much cant.

The Case against a Republican Napoleon, Part I – Napoleon Bonaparte and Egypt

When cautioned before going to Italy that experienced generals would oppose Napoleon, the latter compared himself to ancient heroes Alexander and Caesar, saying that like them, Napoleon would “rush forward.” 321 The anti-slugabed soon added:

---

321 As quoted in Mlle. R. D’Ancemont, The Historical and Unrevealed Memoirs of, etc. (London, 1820); see also Napoleon Bonaparte, The Opinions and Reflections of Napoleon, ed. Lewis Claflin Breed
“Whoever has not mounted Bucephalus, will never be borne on the steed of glory.”

As Napoleon achieved success he argued that he was better than old regime heroes Condé, Turenne, and Villars, because “they had merely to follow the track marked out for them, in order to be great men; but as for me, I can only become so by the sweat of my brow.”

With the sweat of his brow, the twenty-six year-old exclaimed how he took “possession of one of the finest countries in Europe, the inheritance of the Caesars, the birth-place of Raphael, Tasso, and Dante…”

Again, his cult of great men included politicians and artists alike.

While in Italy in 1796 Napoleon regarded great men as something of a rare phenomenon. At Montebello, he said, “Good God…how rare men are. There are eighteen millions in Italy, and I have with difficulty found two, Dandolo and Melzi.”

Dandolo was the Doge of Venice and Melzi was the Count of Magenta. They represent contemporaries whom Napoleon regarded highly. His pantheon, however, also included men from the past. When Napoleon wrote to Josephine, whom he was married to by then, on 18 July 1796, he proudly proclaimed that he had “been in the village of Virgil” (70 B.C.-19 B.C.), a Roman epic poet. On 9 November of that year, he again wrote to

---

322 Bucephalus was Alexander the Great’s horse. As quoted in Mlle. R. D’Ancemont, The Historical and Unrevealed Memoirs of, etc. (London, 1820); see also Napoleon Bonaparte, The Opinions and Reflections of Napoleon, ed. Lewis Claflin Breed (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1926), 86-87.

323 Ibid., 86.

324 Ibid., 90.

325 Napoleon Buonaparte, The Table Talk And Opinions Of Napoleon Buonaparte (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1868), 7.

Josephine, this time referring to himself as “your Achilles,” a hero from a Greek epic.\footnote{Ibid., 57.}

Even in love letters sent to Napoleon’s wife, his cult of great men at this time included the author and subject of ancient Mediterranean epic poetry. The connection to Virgil in particular extended beyond private love letters. A public engraving produced in France in 1797 depicts Napoleon as the republican general liberating Italy with the tomb of Virgil behind Napoleon.\footnote{The symbolism in the image juxtaposes General Bonaparte with an olive branch, while also depicting Marianne, winged figures, a laurel wreath, the word “equality,” and a broken bishop’s crock. Martyn Lyons, “The Liberator of Italy,” Exploring the European Past: Texts & Images, Second Edition (Mason: Thomson, 2007), http://custom.cengage.com/etep/etep_secure/napoleonic_europe/6_liberator.html.} This reflects the view of Napoleon, but what does Virgil have to do with the Republic?

This admiration for antiquity would continue throughout his first Italian campaign and take on a more imperial nature. On 10 March 1797, Napoleon noted to the Army of Italy that “for the first time the French colours fly on the coast of the Adriatic, twenty-four hours’ sailing from ancient Macedonia…”\footnote{Napoleon Bonaparte, “To the Army of Italy” (1797), as quoted in Correspondance de Napoléon I, 1552; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, Letters and Documents of Napoleon, Volume I: The Rise to Power, selected and trans. John Eldred Howard (London: The Cresset Press, 1961), 176.} On 19 June of that year, he wrote to the Provisional Government of Genoa that Andrea Doria, a Genoese who served King Francis I of France in the 1520s, was a great sailor and statesman…The whole of Europe envies your city’s precious honour of having given birth to this famous man. I do not doubt that you will make haste to restore his statue. Please inscribe my name as a contributor towards the expense, for I wish to associate myself with those citizens who are most zealous for the glory and happiness of your country.\footnote{Napoleon Bonaparte, “To the Provisional Government of Genoa” (1797), as quoted in Correspondance de Napoléon I, 1938; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, Letters and Documents of Napoleon, Volume I: The Rise to Power, selected and trans. John Eldred Howard (London: The Cresset Press, 1961), 192.}
On 1 July of that year, Napoleon placed the non-republicans Caesar, Frederick the Great, Hannibal, and Montecuculli in a class together as great soldiers with the still Republican Moreau. While sailing to Egypt, Napoleon’s secretary records that the “sight of the kingdom of Minos led [Napoleon] to reason on the laws best calculated for the government of nations and the birthplace of Zeus [Crete] suggested to [Napoleon] the necessity of a religion for the mass of mankind.” Meanwhile, his soldiers waxed enthusiastic about visiting “lands glorified by the exploits of the Macedonians, Romans and Muslims, and of the most holy of our kings.” Napoleon agreed with such possibilities, noting in September 1797 that “all religions are alike, Mohammedans, Copts, Arabs, pagans, etc.” with “armies such as ours…” Thus, Napoleon and his commanders thought of themselves as following in footsteps of many Mediterranean heroes from diverse eras in history—once again abandoning any republican references.

When in Egypt, Napoleon and his followers linked modern great men there with those of the past. Quartermaster François Bernoyer described the Greek whom Napoleon made police chief as comparable “to one of Homer’s deities at Troy.” Napoleon also honored the majority Muslims by asserting a “right to accord…favor to the ordinary clerics and prayer leaders who are distinguished by their enlightenment, wisdom, and

---

332 Juan Cole, Napoleon’s Egypt: Invading the Middle East (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 17.
333 Ibid., 18.
Napoleon Bonaparte in Egypt acted first and foremost as a dictator, not a modern French republican, and this can best be seen in his religious policies. He honored prominent Egyptian citizens with cockades and allowed muftis “the right to wear a tricolor sash,” which although republican symbols, also represented French imperialism or spreading of French symbols to a colony. He also managed to “secure a certificate of competence in Mohammedan religious knowledge” and wanted to begin the reform of his dreamed of empire’s religious life by conquering the Holy Land that is sacred to adherents of all three faiths. As first evidenced by his actions during his military campaign to conquer Egypt from 1798 to 1799, he greatly understood the power of a religious majority, which could influence a degree of enthusiasm among its adherents that can become fanatical. After crushing a violent uprising in Egypt, General Bonaparte pardoned the imams and sheiks of the El-Azhar mosque, who had done nothing against the French, while ordering the beheading of the real rebels. Similarly, Napoleon praised Alexander the Great’s religious policies by asserting, “There was the instinct of true policy,” hardly republican, however, “in Alexander’s ideas of making himself out to be the descendant of god.” This quotation although still from the Republican Phase is, nevertheless, a later interpretation by Napoleon of his motives in 1798. It is however consistent with other statements and actions he made at the time.

---

335 Ibid., 204.
336 Ibid., 29.
337 Ibid., 29-30.
339 From the quotation for November 3 of Napoleon Bonaparte, *The Napoleon Calendar*.
340 For Dr. A.S. Rappoport and John McErlean’s likely source, see Claire Élisabeth Jeanne Gravier
For example, Napoleon inspired his almost mutinous soldiers during a southward march in Egypt by standing among them and stating:

Courage on the field of battle is insufficient to make a good soldier. It requires, as well, the courage to face fatigue and privation. Suppose I had the intention of journeying to Asia after the conquest of Egypt? To march in the traces of Alexander, I would need to have his soldiers.  

Just as Alexander the Great and his army had marched through the desert to visit the shrine of Amon, Bonaparte treated Islamic sites with admiration and respect during his own desert odyssey. While saying that “everywhere, the rapist is a monster” and appealing to the examples of Alexander and the Roman legions who “protected all religions,” Napoleon instructed his soldiers to act with Muslims as “you did with the Jews and with the Italians. Treat their Muftis and their Imams with respect, as you did the Rabbis and the Bishops.” He also expected Muslim women to be treated with the same respect as Christian women and ordered that “anyone guilty of rape would be shot.” Finally, while in Egypt in 1798, Napoleon wrote to Major-General Bertheir that the “barbarous custom of whipping men suspected of having important secrets to reveal must be abolished. It has always been recognized that this method of interrogation, by


\[\text{Juan Cole, } \text{Napoleon’s Egypt: Invading the Middle East (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 17.}\]

\[\text{Napoleon Bonaparte, “Address to the Army of Egypt,” } \text{Napoleon: Symbol for an Age, A Brief History with Documents, ed. Rafe Blaufarb (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008), 44.}\]

\[\text{J. David Markham, } \text{Napoleon’s Road to Glory: Triumph, Defeats and Immortality (London: Brassey’s, 2003), 65-66. This quotation from Napoleon’s proclamation “From Headquarters, Near-East, 14th Messidor in Year VI of the Republic” also appears in the memoirs of Joseph-Marie Moiret, a French soldier who served in Napoleon’s Army of the Orient and also fantasized about following in the footsteps of “the Macedonian phalanxes . . . the Roman legions and the blessed battalions of the Crusaders.”}\]

\[\text{Joseph-Marie Moiret, } \text{Memoirs of Napoleon’s Egyptian Expedition, 1798-1801 (London: Greenhill Books, 2001), 40.}\]

\[\text{David Markham, } \text{Napoleon for Dummies: A Guide for the Rest of Us!, 106.}\]
putting men to the torture is useless. The wretches say whatever comes into their heads and whatever they think one wants to believe. Consequently, the Commander-in-Chief [i.e. Napoleon] forbids the use of a method which is contrary to reason and humanity.”

Napoleon did not give out such orders only as a result of understanding the advantages offered by not having his soldiers perceived as pillagers or even out of his own sense of morality. Although these factors did play roles in influencing his directives to his army, he also appeared to have had an astonishingly open-mind towards Egyptian religion and felt flattered by those Egyptians who called him Sultan Kebir, which literally means the “Great” Sultan. Appreciation of Islam is tantamount to anti-Republicanism in the Directory-led French sense, because after all, the French Republic in this phase sought to eradicate even Christianity within France. According to a French captain, Bonaparte’s view on religion was therefore Roman, i.e. “Rather than forcing them to adopt the gods of the capital, they placed there the gods of Athens and Carthage.”

Bonaparte even went so far as to state that the Koran predicted his defeat of the Mameluke caste that ruled Egypt and he also talked of the conversion of the French Army of the Orient to Islam. He read Voltaire’s Mahomet and described Muhammad as “a great man who changed the face of the earth…” Bonaparte adopted this seemingly pro-Islamic policy early on in his campaign, writing to Sheik El-Messiri in 1798,

I hope that the time is not far off when I shall be able to assemble all the wise and learned men of this country and establish a uniform government, based on the

---

346 Juan Cole, Napoleon’s Egypt: Invading the Middle East (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 133.
347 Ibid., 141.
principles of the Koran, which alone are true and capable of bringing happiness to men. \textsuperscript{348}

Bonaparte further indicated his utilitarian attitudes towards religion in a conversation in the early 1800s when Napoleon somewhat naively considered the re-conquest of Egypt a possibility if not an eventuality; \textsuperscript{349} Napoleon reportedly declared that he saw himself marching into Asia, riding an elephant, a turban on my head and in my hand the new Koran that I would have composed to suit my needs. In my undertakings I would have combined the experiences of the two worlds, exploiting . . . the theater of all history, attacking the power of England in India, and, by means of that conquest, renewing contact with the old Europe. \textsuperscript{350}

By using his army along with dramatic and emotional appeals to history’s great Middle Eastern men in order to reorganize the “Orient” under French supervision, Napoleon also intended to lay the foundation of an intercontinental religious reorganization under French supervision as well. His fascination with famous Islamic individuals influenced his proposed method of achieving this grand program. Although evidence suggests that Napoleon was indeed moving toward attempting to achieve such remarkable objectives during his brief occupation of Egypt, one Arab witness to Napoleon’s occupation of Egypt, Abd al Rahman Al-Jabarti (1754-1825), however, wrote a less than flattering version about the perceived realities of French rule in Egypt by focusing a lot on what he presents as French arrogance and ignorance regarding Islam and Arabic culture. But although Al-Jabarti chides Bonaparte for errors in his Arabic-

\textsuperscript{348} Napoleon Bonaparte, \textit{Correspondence de Napoléon Ier, publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Vol. IV}, 420; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, “Letter to the Sheik El-Messiri, Cairo, 28 August 1798,” \textit{The Mind of Napoleon}, 104.


\textsuperscript{350} Napoleon Bonaparte, “The Course of Ambition” in \textit{The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from
language proclamation, Al-Jabarti himself inaccurately declares “Bonaparte” to be a title rather than a name, thereby revealing that cultural misunderstandings in this particular colonial encounter were essentially mutual.  

Al-Jabarti, while not exactly supporting Napoleon’s “meddling” with Islamic life in Egypt, does provide us with some understanding of how Napoleon actively attempted to reform Islamic institutions. Just as Napoleon worked to create a hierarchical structure for Jews in Egypt, he also strove to establish new positions of authority for Muslim leaders (and possible collaborators). Although Napoleon’s system in Egypt would subordinate Muslim Arabs to mostly Catholic French military commanders, his structure did allow for local representation in the form of advisory governing councils called diwans. He ultimately selected Shaykh al-Sharqawi to serve as the President of “a grand diwan, which drew representatives from all of Egypt’s districts as well as Cairo.”  

Napoleon’s religious policies as relates to the cult of great men developed as he rose to and attempted to maintain power.

Interestingly, “Napoleon did not think of himself as the heir to the Pharaohs.” After all, he was not a native Egyptian. Instead, he came to Egypt as an invader and therefore hoped to emulate the exploits of two of the greatest of commanders from ancient Greece and Rome respectively. But it was not Greek democracy and Roman

---

352 Ibid., 8.
republicanism that this Republican general sought to revive. Far away from the French Republic and in “exotic” lands as the campaign continued on, Napoleon occasionally shifted away from the Republican examples cited in the preceding paragraph to remind his companions in arms of ancient monarchic and dictatorial conquerors—roles that he as republican general and not yet head of state could not really fulfill. Thus, we see a contradiction in Napoleon’s cult of great men at this point, which again begs the question of whether or not he truly admired republican heroes for their republicanism. As Timothy Wilson-Smith explains, Alexander the Great, who had pretensions to universal monarchy, and Julius Caesar, who died at the hands of assassins who feared similar pretensions, “had gone to Egypt, and so would” Napoleon.354

Of course, at this moment in Napoleon’s career, the ancient hero who appealed to him most was Alexander the Great, hardly a republican. Indeed, what Napoleon admired about Alexander was Alexander’s religious “universalism” and his imperial “universalism”. Universalism as such is compatible with the Republic. But it has to be the universalism of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Thus, Napoleon envisioned his conquest of Egypt in more than just military terms. As such, his aspirations at this time look more along the lines of establishing a diverse middle eastern empire rather than a republican colony or base from which to menace British interests and accordingly the historic great men he appealed to and the praiseworthy attributes he identifies of contemporary men are not overwhelmingly republican either.

Evidence suggests that Napoleon may have considered establishing French or

354 Ibid., 118.
rather Napoleonic hegemony in the Mediterranean following the Macedonian example at least as early as his victorious Italian Campaign of 1796 through 1797. He addressed “the army in Ancona in February, 1797: ‘Soldiers, for the first time, the flag of France floats over the eastern shore of the Adriatic, only twenty-four leagues from Alexander the Great’s point of departure for the East. The same glorious destiny awaits you.’”\textsuperscript{355} The British government actually worried that French forces under Napoleon might imitate the Greco-Macedonian phalanxes and companion cavalry of Alexander by invading “northern India through Afghanistan.”\textsuperscript{356} In fact, Napoleon actually expressed such ideas to his officers and Tippu Sultan, i.e. for an invasion force following the route of Alexander the Great and Nadir Shah by going from Egypt “to Syria and along the Tigris to Baghdad” turning east and going “up to Kermanshah in Iran,” transiting the Iranian plateau, entering Afghanistan, and then crossing “through the Kyber pass down into North India.”\textsuperscript{357} C-F de Méneval notes that Napoleon may have desired General Louis Charles Antoine Desaix de Veygoux to be around to invade India, because Desaix “would have been the Hephaestion of this second Alexander.”\textsuperscript{358}

Like Alexander, Napoleon understood his mission in military, political, and even religious terms.\textsuperscript{359} Napoleon also, secretly at first, thought that the great men of ancient

\textsuperscript{355} See Kobler, 24.  
\textsuperscript{356} Linda Colley, \textit{Captives Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850} (Jonathan Cape, 2002), 347-348.  
\textsuperscript{358} C-F de Méneval, \textit{Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte: The Court of the First Empire, Volume I} (New York: P. F. Collins & Son, 1910), 319.  
\textsuperscript{359} His actions in Ancona are quite revealing of his religious policies. Simon Schwarzfuchs writes, ‘The French army saved the Jews of Ancona. . . . Frenchmen pulled off the yellow badge that the Jews had had to wear on their hats, and the Jews replaced it with the cockade. The ‘liberator of Italy’ abolished the
Israel could prove of value to his enterprise. Before setting out for the Orient, he wrote
notes “about the commerce of the kings of Israel, David and Solomon . . .”360 Thus, after
taking St. Jean d’Acre, where Napoleon was stopped historically, he hoped to resurrect a
Jewish Middle Eastern state.361

During the actual historic campaign, he appointed Jacques-Francois Menou as
governor-general of Palestine, provided divans for Gaza, Ramleh, and Jaffa,362 and “in
order to arouse enthusiasm among the Jews and to win their friendship, spread the rumor
of his intention to create a Jewish army and to establish a Jewish kingdom.”363 These
actions caused Jews living in what is now Israel to speak of Bonaparte “as the second
Messiah.” Although defeat by the Ottoman held fortress of Acre later in the year
prevented Napoleon from occupying Jerusalem and sent him back to Egypt and soon
after back to France, enthusiasm over the prospect of the potential success of a French
“liberation” of Jerusalem had already reached Europe.364 Such lofty expectations spread

---

360 Kobler, 14.

361 For more on Napoleon’s plans concerning the possible organization of a Middle Eastern Jewish
state, see Ben Weider, “Napoleon and the Jews” in *Napoleonic Scholarship* (Montreal: International
Napoleonic Society, 1998), 41, 45.

362 In the same year, some Sephardim in Palestine began unsuccessful negotiations to purchase
Jerusalem from the Turk Mohamet Ali Bey. See d’Ancona, “The Sephardi Community of Leghorn
(Livorno)”, 197.

363 Kobler, 111.

364 Such aspirations of Jewish statehood were not limited to those actually living in the Holy Land.
Franz Kobler explains how “Charles-Joseph Prince de Ligne (1735-1814), born in Brussels, friend of
Voltaire and Rousseau, a favorite of the Austrian emperor’s and of Catherine of Russia, one of the most
lucid minds of his age, drew up the most advanced scheme for the Restoration of the Jewish people
conceived until then. De Ligne sought the basis for the reestablishment of the Jewish state in negotiations
to be conducted with the Sultan. He suggested that the Jews themselves, namely those resident in Turkey,
should be the mediators. De Ligne’s *Mémoire sur les Juifs* was published in 1797. Its appearance
far outside of French borders. A number of Moravian Jews opined that the French Government would request, secure and (if necessary) take from the Turkish Empire the city of Jerusalem with the surrounding territory and there re-establish and restore the settlement of the people of Israel. France intends to attract to this city and territory the most distinguished, wealthiest and most industrious Jews of the whole world under the promise of the protection of their religion and to direct by their speculations and enterprises the far remote southern and Egyptian colonial commerce through that place.365

Napoleon, though, considered an even more grandiose reorganization of the Middle East than “only” occupying Egypt and creating a Jewish state in Palestine. Franz Kobler recounts how a

precise parallel to the offer to the ‘Rightful Heirs of Palestine’ [the Jews] is to be found in the letter which Bonaparte addressed to Emir Bashir, Emir of the Druse, on March 20, 1799, only two days after his arrival before Acre. ‘It is my intention,’ reads a passage of this letter, ‘to make the Druse nation independent, to lower the tribute it pays, and to give it the port of Beirut and other towns which it needs as outlets for its commerce.’366

He next planned to push onwards to Damascus and Aleppo before taking Constantinople and replacing the Turkish empire with a “grand empire.” Subsequently, he imagined his army capturing Adrianople and Vienna, where Napoleon would destroy the Habsburg house of Austria, before finally returning to Paris.367 Not for the last time he had taken leave of his sense at this time.

All the while, Napoleon fantasized about how he would not only tolerate Islam, but foster its continued influence both out of apparently genuine respect for the religion

365 Ibid., 165-166.  
366 See ibid., 124-125.  
367 See Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte, i (London: H.  
102
and out of a hope of gaining the support of a multi-religious army to restructure the entire
Middle East. Before departing for Egypt, Napoleon first confided the following to a
comrade of his youth:

This country [Egypt] seems to offer me the most fortunate chances: the people
who inhabit it, cruelly harassed by the Beys and the Mamelukes, will see with
delight a brave army and a renowned general labour to extricate them from the
encroachment of their oppressors. Milder laws, better treatment, a general
affranchisement, will easily bind them to my standard: from this place to Syria,
the passage is but short. I will march towards that province and soon a new
kingdom shall spring from the ruins of the ancient one. What a spectacle will this
be, my friend, to the astonished universe! A Corsican at the head of a French
victorious army, re-establishing the Holy City, and getting himself proclaimed as
prince and sovereign of the celebrated land, where was born and died the God of
Christians, will be one of those events, which change the appearance of the world
... Thanks to my activity, all the parts of my plan are fixed upon; not an atom is
neglected; all is foreseen, both the conduct to be pursued in the course of the
operation, and the obstacles I shall have to surmount.

... As soon as ever I shall be in Egypt, all those who will have followed
me, will necessarily attach themselves to me. ... I will chain them to the climate
with harems where shall bloom the divine Circassians, and the beautiful
Georgians.368

Napoleon next explained his objectives to the Directors in Paris. In Paul Johnson’s
words

to found a French free-labor sugar-growing colony to replace the West Indian
ones; to dig a Suez canal; and to link up with the Marathas and Tipu Sahib,
opponents of British rule in India, and help them destroy it. He had vague plans
about the vast Turkish empire, too, of which Egypt was nominally a part. But
there was a deeper wish: to play a modern Alexander the Great and acquire rich
provinces of inconceivable magnitude. ... He calculated that with 30,000 French
troops, he could raise another 30,000 mercenaries in Egypt, and with 50,000
camels and 150 cannon, he could be on the Indus within four months. He worked
all this out down to the last round of ammunition and water canister.369

Colburn and R. Bentley, 1831), 208.
368 As quoted in Mlle. R. D’Ancemont, The Historical and Unrevealed Memoirs of, etc. (London,
1820); see also Napoleon Bonaparte, The Opinions and Reflections of Napoleon, ed. Lewis Claflin Breed
(Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1926), 93-95.
369 Johnson, 35-36.
The Directors actually approved of and authorized Napoleon’s plans described in the paragraph above and he continued to explain his project on the eve of his departure for Egypt in 1798.

Upon receiving his final orders from the Directors, he reportedly said, “Here is the contract of the sale, which the French government makes me of the kingdom of Jerusalem and Tripoli.” He also remarked that his “projected empire requires other persons besides soldiers: I intend to unite learned men of every class with them.” He then listed various scholarly and scientific professions that should join the expedition in order to extend their “knowledge through the country [Egypt]. They will educate their youth, whose number, in course of time, will increase, and my empire will be perfectly European.” As that last statement indicates, Napoleon hoped that by means of education, he also had hopes of transforming Middle Easterners into Europeans, although a look at some additional statements suggest that this transformation may have been more of synthesis of cultures rather than a complete replacement of Islamic culture with Judeo-Christian culture.

After his return to France, Napoleon elaborated on his plans to various associates of his. In a conversation in the early 1800s, he revealed his strategy of reconfiguring Middle Eastern religion and society upon lines favorable to a European, such as

---


Napoleon. Although he claimed that he would have adopted some of the native customs, he spoke of composing a “new” Koran and combining “the experiences of the two worlds.” Finally, on December 1, 1805, the day before his greatest victory, i.e. the battle of Austerlitz, Napoleon, speaking to his staff, elaborated still further on his astonishing vision:

If I had been able to take Acre [in 1799], I would have put on a turban, I would have made my soldiers wear big Turkish trousers, and I would have exposed them to battle only in case of extreme necessity. I would have made them into a sacred battalion—my immortals. I would have finished the war against the Turks with Arabic, Greek, and Armenian troops. Instead of a battle in Moravia, I would have won a battle at Issus, I would have made myself emperor of the East, and I would have returned to Paris by way of Constantinople.

Notice in the above selections Napoleon’s presentation of himself as universal conqueror in the ancient or medieval mold. He discusses emulating Muslims in general and specifically Turks, the very European image of the despotic. But he goes even further, first imagining creating a modern version of the legendary Persian immortals and then envisioning a victory at Issus, where Alexander achieved one of his most crucial

---

372 Ibid., 97-98.
373 Napoleon Bonaparte, “The Course of Ambition,” 48; Claire de Vergennes de Rémusat, Mémoires, 1802-1808, Volume I, 274.
374 Napoleon’s allusions to “immortals” and “Issus” refer to two of his favorite leaders of antiquity: Cyrus and Alexander, respectively. In the sixth century B.C., Great King Cyrus created the immortals (named because their number was always kept at ten thousand) as the elite Persian royal guard—a unit that oddly enough would be defeated about two hundred years later after Cyrus’s death by Macedonian King Alexander at none other than Issus in modern-day Turkey in 333 B.C. Napoleon’s interest in claiming to be a new Cyrus would resurface during the Sanhedrin. Napoleon Bonaparte, “On Religions” in The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words, ed. J. Christopher Herold (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 49; Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, Mémoires sur Napoléon, le Directoire, le Consulat, l’Empire et la Restauration, Volume II, (Paris: Garnier), 342. For a scholarly discussion on Napoleon’s broader aims in conquering the Middle East, including the possibility of constructing a Suez Canal, see J. Christopher Herold, “Napoleon in Action: The Egyptian Campaign,” in Napoleon and his Times: Selected Interpretations, ed. Frank A. Kafkaer and James M. Laux (Malabar: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1989), 24, 31, 33, 35.
triumphs. Napoleon’s former private secretary corroborated Napoleon’s claims to have planned for campaigns that “reminded him of the triumphs of his favorite hero, Alexander, with whom he so much desired to associate his name.” Indeed, Bourrienne explains that while in Egypt, General Bonaparte spoke of plans to pay off the Shah of Persia for consenting “to the establishment of military magazines on certain points of his territory” along a path that would lead Bonaparte at the head of thirty thousand troops over the Euphrates, through Persia, and into India, where he hoped to reach the Indus with 40,000 men, including some of his original Christian Frenchmen, along with newly recruited Jewish Palestinians and Muslims Arabs, by March 1800. The model is clearly Alexander.

In order to aid the realization of these projects, Napoleon expected the Directors to send Talleyrand with an offer to the Sultan that the French would participate in a Franco-Turkish amphibious assault on the Russian-held Crimea in exchange for non-Turkish intervention in the proposed French invasion of India by land. On 28 July 1799, Napoleon wrote to the Executive Directory that if they sent 15,000 additional men, “we can go anywhere, even to Constantinople.” Napoleon even wrote to Tippoo

---


377 Ibid., 161. For more on Napoleon’s designs on the Ottoman provinces of Egypt and Syria, see Stephen Pope, *Dictionary of the Napoleonic Wars* (London: Cassell, 1999), 109, 327.

378 Wilson-Smith, *Napoleon: Man of War, Man of Peace*, 119-120.


Saib/Tipu Sahib, but, of course, this alliance was not to be. And Napoleon’s later vision of marching his army from Moscow to India, because “Alexander the Great, to reach the Ganges, started from just such a distant point as Moscow,” ended in even greater disaster than what befell the then General Bonaparte at Acre in 1799. Nevertheless, throughout his reign, Napoleon understood the value of such historic lessons as those left by the Great Alexander. Like Alexander, who ruled as king of Macedon, hegemon of the Corinthian League, great king of Persia, and pharaoh of Egypt, Napoleon wore many hats, including emperor of the French, king of Italy, mediator of the Swiss Confederation, and protector (rather than “president”) of the Confederation of the Rhine. Had Napoleon succeeded in defeating the Russians in 1812, he would have possibly assumed the additional role of protector of a Northern Confederation composed of Denmark, a resurrected Polish kingdom, and Sweden. Similarly, one of the possible options for Napoleon’s consideration in the event of a victory over Russia in 1812 or 1813, aside from creating independent states, involved forming “several duchies into a League of the Vistula.” This evidence demonstrates a conception of his reign that parallels the precedent set by Alexander in antiquity regarding the adoption of multiple titles and rule over a vast and diverse empire. Napoleon read Voltaire’s History of Charles XII during the invasion of Russia and occupation of Moscow in 1812. The possible inclusion of


Sweden in Napoleon’s Grand Empire is not part of any admiration for Charles XII, whom Napoleon only criticized, but again of a pretension to universal monarchy akin to what Alexander briefly established.

While in the Middle East he continued to appeal to the great men of antiquity as a means of garnering support for himself and his exploits. In addition to showing “hims elf equal to Julius Caesar in clemency by pardoning the sheiks and the imams of the El-Azhar mosque” and making “a point of favoring Islam” as Alexander the Great had trekked through the desert to visit the shrine of Amon,” he enjoyed being called Sultan Kebir, literally the ‘Great’ [my italics] Sultan; he said that his defeat of the Mamelukes was predicted in the Koran; he talked of the conversion of the army, while informing the rulers of the mosque that circumcision and a ban on alcohol would not attract French soldiers. His reward came in spring 1799, when he had the ulemas of El-Azhar proclaim that Sultan Kebir “loved the Muslims, cherished the Prophet, instructed himself by reading the Koran every day, and desired to build a mosque unrivalled in splendour and to embrace the Muslim faith.

Islam was not the only religion in the Middle East in 1798 and nor were the only people there Muslims.

Napoleon also appealed to the memory of the great men from the history of other religions with Middle Eastern origins. He hoped to reach Jerusalem and wrote, “When you read this letter, it is quite possible that I shall be standing on the ruins of the city of Solomon…” These were not mere personal boasts to intimate correspondents. On 29

---

385 Ulemas are Muslim legal scholars.
386 Wilson-Smith, Napoleon: Man of War, Man of Peace, 125.
387 P. C. Elgood, Bonaparte’s Adventure in Egypt (London: Humphrey Milford, 1936), 205; Franz 108
May 1799, ironically after Napoleon had begun his retreat from Acre, La Décade reported that Jews

perhaps see in him [Bonaparte] the Messiah, and soon twenty prophecies will have predicted the event, the epoch, and even the circumstances of his coming. It is at least very probable that the Jewish people is about to transform itself again into a national body, that the Temple of Solomon will be rebuilt…

The Temple of Solomon was not rebuilt and Napoleon soon fled the Middle East for France, where in short time he would switch the role of general to head of state and government.

The Case against a Republican Napoleon, Part II – Napoleon Bonaparte and Catholicism

The Napoleon of this phase also espoused a version of religious cooperation and toleration that could allow great Frenchmen of various religious leanings recognition in the cult of great men. Napoleon’s religious policies in Egypt offers clear evidence of a non-“republican” i.e. an “imperial” Napoleon circa 1797 to 1801. More evidence appears if we turn to his religious policies in France. If Napoleon had maintained the existence of the post-Terror “constitutional” church along with the Directory’s formal separation of church and state, then he would have moved in a more or less contemporary “republican” direction on the de facto model of the old Dutch Republic or the new de jure model of the American republic. But if he reestablished Catholicism to some sort of officially and favored status while instituting a policy of toleration for all other “cults,” then he would

have moved in the direction of the antique Macedonian or Roman imperial model, or at least what he imagined as such. This conclusion is not all that conjectural or speculative, since he overtly admired Alexander the Great’s example in the domain of religion.

As a student of history, Napoleon followed many precedents of states controlling religion. When Napoleon Bonaparte returned to France in 1799, he made use of his past experiences with religion to gain support from the Catholic majority in France that had been disillusioned by revolutionary excesses. The activities of the various revolutionary regimes had created religious disunity, which René Rémond sees as “a final religious war,” evidenced by the police’s recording of at least some violation of the laws restricting public worship in every one of the sixty-nine cantons of the department of Yonne between the fall of Robespierre and the coming of Bonaparte. In the aftermath of the left-wing coup d’état of September 1797, France had endured a comprehensive two-year dechristianization campaign, which lasted until November 1799, when Bonaparte overthrew Barras’ feeble Directory. In that year, Bonaparte recognized that the Catholic religion could effectively mend the religious divisions of the revolution,

---

388 Ibid., 76.
389 For an overview of Napoleon’s settlement with the Catholic Church, see J. David Markham, “Religious Peace” in Napoleon’s Road to Glory: Triumphs, Defeats & Immortality (London: Brassey’s, 2003), 107-111. Markham provides a summary of the background of the situation inherited by Napoleon before addressing how Napoleon sought to resolve the religious divisions of the French Revolution. Markham reminds us that Napoleon was after many kinds of peace: domestic, foreign, and religious.
390 Susanne Desan, Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religion and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 29; Rémond, 47.
391 Desan, 11.
392 In this way, Napoleon’s policies seem as a prototype to The Communist Manifesto, because Napoleon also saw religion as an “opiate of the people,” though he did not use that same phrase. Instead, Napoleon revealed his understanding of the complacency that religion creates among the masses by declaring in 1806 that religion “associates with Heaven an idea of equality which prevents the rich from being massacred by the poor.” As quoted in baron Pelet de la Lozère, Opinions de Napoléon sur divers sujets de politique et d’administration recueillis par un membre de son Conseil d’État (Paris: Didiot, 1833),
provide a basis for morality, and support the authority of the new Consular regime.

Within two months after the coup d’état of 18 brumaire an VIII, First Consul Bonaparte, in part influenced by his mother, who attended mass daily, and his uncle, Joseph Fesch who later became Archbishop of Lyon in 1802 and a cardinal in 1803, allowed non-alienated churches to reopen and began to grant amnesty to deported priests. As generous as these efforts appear, Bonaparte only intended to restore Catholicism to a certain extent, without returning the Catholic Church’s full ancien régime privileges. Evidence exists suggesting that, although Bonaparte did not personally adhere to any definite faith, he nonetheless wisely wanted to pour water on the fires of animosity that had erupted against the Catholic church, so that a united Catholic church in France could serve as a fortress of order and social peace.

The Concordat of 1801 best exemplifies this policy by making reference to Catholicism not as the “state religion,” but as the “religion of the majority of the French,” wording contributed by none other than Talleyrand. The Concordat is also the end of the Republic. From 1801 to 1802, Bonaparte and his diplomats negotiated and had passed into law this concordat with Pope Pius VII that reversed anti-clerical revolutionary laws passed in the 1790s and affirmed Catholicism’s preeminent religious position.
amongst the French. The Concordat fits in our discussion of the Napoleonic cult of great men and relates to the republican phase, because while the Defeated Napoleon called Francis I “a mere hero of tournaments, a drawing-room beau, [and] one of those monumental pygmies,”\(^398\) the Republican Napoleon did admire Francis’s religious policies. In some respects, the Concordat went back to the Concordat of Bologna between Leo X and Francis I in 1516, which allowed the French government to supervise the appointment of the higher clergy and the payment of the lower ones. Thus, Napoleon once again imitated an undertaking by one of France’s greatest leaders—in this case Francis I—but not a republican one.

Napoleon’s concordat with the papacy chose a basically royal or imperial solution to the (less than compatible) goals of religious peace with the papacy on the one hand and religious diversity in France on the other—that is, an over-the-top treaty with another monarch, namely the pope, and on the model of Francis I, plus a unilateral promulgation of measures ensuring religious toleration on the model of Henry IV. A republican solution to the same problems (with examples in Jefferson’s United States or, nearer to France, the Dutch Republic) would have been peace with the papacy with at least de facto separation of church and state, something Napoleon Bonaparte clearly rejected. Again, keep in mind that, when in Egypt, what Napoleon admired about Alexander was his empire, his religious universalism, and his pluralism—all of which are convenient for an empire. The same things are what, when in France, Napoleon admired about Henry IV.

---

\(^{398}\) According to a conversation in 1816 referenced in comte Emmanuel de Las Cases, *Mémorial de Sainte Hélène*, New ed. (Paris: H. K. Delloye, 1840), 17 August 1816; see also Napoleon Bonaparte,
From Republican to Imperialist

The Concordat, which set a tone for treatment of religion elsewhere, contained many important components. The circumstances surrounding the idea of this concordat and its text also demonstrate the increasing transition of Napoleon from Republican to Imperialist. The Concordat significantly incorporated an agreement establishing special relations between France and the papacy that made Pius VII available to sanction Bonaparte’s acceptance of a crown at a coronation. These efforts during Napoleon’s Republican Phase set the stage for the later inclusion of Catholic, Jews, and Protestants alike in positions of power and notability later during Napoleon’s Imperial Phase.

As First Consul, a revived Roman title, Napoleon boasted: “I am descended from the best type of Caesars, that which founds.”

Julius Caesar may have held such traditional Roman Republican titles as Consul and Dictator, but he became the first in what ultimately developed into an imperial dynasty that ruled the Roman world for over one hundred years. Whereas Caesar’s murder meant that his successor would complete the transitional process from republic to empire, Napoleon combined Caesar and Augustus’ careers during his transition from republican consul to emperor in the same political career. Accordingly Napoleon regarded the first of the Caesars as one of his favorite great men and declared that he would show “how a great man, a modern Caesar,

*The Mind of Napoleon*, 59.

399 This article also mentions Napoleon’s “desire to recapture Egypt.” J.M.P. McErlean, “Le Blocus Continental: A Historical Revision,” *First Empire: The International Magazine for the Napoleonic*
can bring general happiness to mankind." In this statement, we see that what Napoleon admired about Caesar was his ability to bring a general happiness to mankind. Caesar was great because, while a republican technically, he nevertheless laid the foundations for an imperial dynasty, just as Napoleon would do nearly two thousand years later, and also because Caesar attempted to unify the ancient world and expand political participation within the Roman state by, for example, expanding the membership in the senate blurring the distinction between Gallic and Roman in the process—efforts an enlightened and revolutionary Napoleon also regarded as his ideological objectives.

The blurring of ambiguously republican and monarchic heroes for Napoleon persisted in his Consular phase. During the War of the Second Coalition, Napoleon wrote to Talleyrand that the crossing of the French army through the Saint-Bernard pass was unlike anything since Charlemagne. Soon after the great artist David painted the great conqueror Napoleon “as a new Hannibal and a new Charlemagne”—two conquerors who also invaded Italy. Hannibal led the army of a questionably republican state and Mably’s Charlemagne made him a constitutional king, but I doubt that this is the Charlemagne that Napoleon admired based on his actual comments about Charlemagne. Aside from connecting himself to two great military commanders, Napoleon therefore also blurred his role as political leader of a republic that began to


400 Johnson, 94.
402 Wilson-Smith, 30.
403 According to Roman sources, Carthage had a “senate” and elected offices, but the city-state was according to legend founded by a queen (Dido) and later dominated by the Barcid family during the
look more and more like an empire. The transition from the example of such Roman Republican heroes as Scipio during the Egyptian expedition to such figures as Hannibal during the Second Italian Campaign is particularly striking because of the corresponding shift of focusing on a citizen army that fought and then went back to being citizens à la the Roman Republic to one of “mercenaries” à la Carthage. As Christopher Prendergast points out, “The character of the Grande Armée as a citizen-army was seriously compromised as it absorbed more and more foreigners from the conquered territories.”

In the first half of Napoleon’s term as First Consul, he made occasional references to great French kings as model leaders. In a letter to his brother Lucien, Minister for Home Affairs, of December 25, 1799, Napoleon cited Henry IV as an example of how to work for “the prosperity of France.” In 1802, Napoleon offered to make Talleyrand a cardinal in imitation of the title held by Louis XIV’s prime minister. Talleyrand responded that this was not necessary, because Henry IV’s principal minister, Sully, did not hold that clerical rank. As France continued to expand to non-French speaking lands, Napoleon and his supporters looked to other, more imperial great men for comparisons. In April 1803, for example, Napoleon noted that the “minister will draw up a plan for placing the statue of Charlemagne on the Place de la Concorde, or on the so-called Place Vendôme.”

On 1 October 1803, Napoleon merged the memory of the Punic Wars.

Prendergast, 128.
As quoted in Denis Bingham, A Selection from the Letters and Despatches of the First Napoleon: With Explanatory Notes, V. 2 (London: Chapman and Hall, limited, 1884), 10.
ancient and medieval Roman empires: “‘In the centre of the Place Vendôme in Paris a column shall be erected similar to that in honour of Trajan in Rome….The column will be surmounted by a semi-circular platform decorated with olive leaves and carrying a statue of Charlemagne.’”

Thus, even during his republican phase, there are moments where the republican Napoleon blurs with the imperial Napoleon. At times during a “republican” phase, Napoleon’s heroes might not be republican and the reason why they might not be republican has to do with his progression toward empire. They do, however, fall in the category of “great” men as he understood it.

Preliminary Conclusions

In his first year as First Consul, Napoleon commemorated Washington’s death on 14 December “‘with a brilliant ceremony’” intended according to Bourrienne “‘to dazzle the Parisians’.”

Napoleon commissioned the poet Louis de Fontanes (1757-1821) to write the éloge or funeral oration for Washington in which Fontanes linked “in the same grandiloquent homage ‘this American hero’ and ‘the genius whose triumphant hands healed the nation’s wounds’.”

Napoleon also “went to the Galerie de Diane where he scrutinized the many busts he had placed there, among them Scipio, Brutus, Cicero, Cato, Demosthenes, Hannibal, Alexander, Caesar, Washington, Frederick the Great and

408 Guerrini, 100.
409 Ibid., 35.
410 Ibid., 36.
Mirabeau.”411 While “looking out of a window in the Galerie, Napoleon also commented on “the good Louis XVI’.”412 Thus, during the Consulate, in this transitional phase between his service in the republican armies and before his reign as emperor, Napoleon simultaneously admired great American, Carthaginian, French, Greek, Macedonian, Prussian, and republican and imperial Roman generals, monarchs, orators, and politicians. Yet, who among these did he prefer over others?

In Spring 1800, Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne reports that Bonaparte conversed about the warriors of antiquity, especially Alexander, Caesar, Scipio, and Hannibal. I asked him which he preferred, Alexander or Caesar? “I place Alexander in the first rank,” said he, “yet I admire Caesar’s fine campaign in Africa. But the ground of my preference for the King of Macedonia is the plan, and above all, the execution, of his campaign in Asia. Only those who are utterly ignorant of war can blame Alexander for having spent seven months at the siege of Tyre. For my part, I would have staid [sic] there seven years, had it been necessary. This is a great subject of dispute; but I look upon the siege of Tyre, the conquest of Egypt, and the journey to the Oasis of Ammon, as a decided proof of the genius of that great captain. His object was to give the King of Persia (of whose force he had only beaten a feeble advance-guard at the Granicus and Issus) time to reassemble his troops, so that he might overthrow, at a blow, the colossus which he had as yet only shaken. By pursuing Darius into his states, Alexander would have separated himself from his reinforcements, and would have met only scattered parties of troops who would have drawn him into deserts where his army would have been sacrificed. By persevering in the taking of Tyre, he secured his communications with Greece, the country he loved as dearly as I love France, and in whose glory he placed his own. By taking possession of the rich province of Egypt, he forced Darius to come to defend or deliver it, and, in so doing, to march halfway to meet him. By representing himself as the son of Jupiter, he worked upon the ardent feelings of the orientals in a way that powerfully seconded his designs. Though he died at thirty-three, what a name he has left behind him!”413

Thus, even while officially a First Consul of a French Republic, Napoleon preferred the

411 Ibid., 38.
412 Ibid., 38.
Macedonian monarch Alexander to the Roman dictator Caesar. Moreover, Napoleon’s admiration for Alexander focused on both military and religious achievements.

Napoleon’s admiration for such contrasting figures as Macedonian king Alexander the Great and American president Thomas Jefferson who are not in the same category reflects a contradiction and problem with the idea of a republican Napoleon. If Napoleon as a republican general could see himself as a new Alexander in Egypt, could Napoleon actually be a republican? Did Napoleon actually admire Jefferson for being a republican or for his character and talents rather than ideology? I am far from sure that this is a republican phase in any sense other than that it occurred under The Republic. In June 1797, Napoleon asked Miot de Melito, “Do you believe that I triumph in Italy for the Carnots, Barras, etc….I wish to undermine the Republican party, but only for my own profit and not that of the former dynasty…”

The evidence suggests that Napoleon had to make allusions to republican heroes under a republican government, but his interest in the cult of great men had more to do with attributes that could be applied to heroes regardless of ideology or nationality. While German nationalist Nicolaus Forkel (1749-1818) wrote on J. S. Bach as a “great man” in 1802, Napoleon had other men in mind. As First Consul, Napoleon regarded Berthier, Bessieres, Duroc, Eugene, Junot, Lannes, Lemarrois, Marmont, and Rapp as affectionate, brave, dependable, faithful, loving, and loyal friends. These attributes could be applied to men who toiled under practically any

---

416 Napoleon Bonaparte, The Opinions and Reflections of Napoleon, ed. Lewis Claflin Breed
government system and are the qualities that Napoleon really admired in a brave monarchist Alexander or polymath republican Jefferson.

Napoleon could argue, as he did in 1804, that it “is the task of the government, and of those who support it, to enlighten the public…” As First Consul and Emperor, Napoleon’s Civil Code increasingly resembled something like the beginnings of a “universal law” called for by the republican Jefferson during the American Revolution that “enlightened” the public of France, its colonies, and the satellite states of the Grand Empire, for Napoleon spread it throughout Europe during his reign. But Napoleon’s interests in great men mostly had imperial connotations, particularly as he moved even closer to founding a universal monarchy. Needless to say, a republican First Consul could hardly stand at the helm of a universal monarchy. That role was one to be played by an emperor.

---


At an unspecified date after the death of the Duc d’Enghien, but before the institution of the Empire in 1804, during a social gathering, Napoleon entered into a lengthy discussion on great men, praising Alexander the Great, Charlemagne and Louis XIV for projecting themselves as more than men (for emphasizing their kingship and in Alexander’s case alleged divinity), while diminishing Henry IV for trying to be simply a “good” man. Napoleon then expressed skepticism regarding Caesar’s greatness and criticized Tacitus’s methods, even questioning the depiction of Nero as a tyrant who yet was somehow loved by the people at times. Finally, Napoleon said that the man whose history, if done properly, Napoleon most wanted to read was that of Frederick II of Prussia, because he understood his “business in every sort of way,” even if those ladies in Napoleon’s present company thought Frederick “harsh and selfish.” As Napoleon explained further, a “great statesman…is a completely eccentric personage, who stands always alone…” For Napoleon, such “great personages” as those mentioned above along with himself have to do such actions as to execute the Duc d’Enghien and thus may be regarded as “violent and cruel”, but this perception is only because these actions
“contribute as a whole to that great work which the public does not understand…” — back to secrets of state.

Throughout his Imperial Phase, Napoleon returned to the kings and emperors like Alexander the Great, Charlemagne, Louis XIV, and Frederick the Great as his heroes and models, just as Napoleon would comment further both positively and negatively on Caesar, Henry IV, and Nero. Yet, as late as 1811, Napoleon discussed the struggle in Spain between France and England as reminiscent of that between Rome and Carthage. While it may seem strange that an emperor would see a parallel with republican Rome during the imperial phase, we should keep in mind that if anything was consistent about whom, what, and when Napoleon admired from history, it was that he was largely inconsistent. As will be seen throughout this chapter, Napoleon’s personal pantheon constantly changed with the circumstances.

Thus, from 1804 through 1815, the Imperial Napoleon transformed the French Republic into a Grand Empire, maintaining some of the trappings of Roman Republicanism that continued to exist under the Roman Empire. He stated explicitly that he wanted the title of French citizen to be the most desired title on earth and compared outright the title of French citizen to that of Roman citizen. Napoleon decreed that all Frenchmen had citizenship in Naples, since the King of Naples served Napoleon as a Frenchman and as a grand dignitary of the French Empire. Napoleon also offered French senatorial seats to such figures as the Venetian doge. As Bell notes, “in the last years of

---

420 “Discours de l’Empereur, le 16 juin 1811,” *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier publiée par ordre...
the Empire, more than a third of Napoleon’s … Senate came from territories well outside France’s 1789 boundaries.”

Annie Jourdan and Martyn Lyons explain that for a time “Napoleon portrayed himself as a ‘republican Emperor.’” Well, so did Augustus.

This transitional development parallels others within the Grand Empire that pertain to the cult of great men, particularly with regards to the Panthéon and Legion of Honor. Of those Napoleon interred in the Panthéon, for example, not all were French military men. Consider the nationalities and careers of the six most famous men interred by Napoleon: Jean-Étienne-Marie Portalis, a French jurist and politician, in 1807; Pierre Jean George Cabanis, a French physiologist, in 1808; Jean Lannes, a French general, in 1810; Louis Antoine de Bougainville, a French navigator and military commander, in 1811; Jan Willem de Winter, a Dutch admiral, in 1812; and Giuseppe Lodovico Lagrangia, an Italian mathematician and astronomer, in 1813. As these examples indicate, the “great men” of the “French” Panthéon under Napoleon included civil servants and scientists in addition to military figures, some of whom came from outside of the French territory bounded by the Alps, the Pyrenees, and the Rhine.

The Legion of Honor similarly extended its membership to non-Frenchmen. In 1807, Napoleon rewarded the “most distinguished” soldier of the Russian guard as well as Grand Duke Constantine with the Legion of Honor. By 1811, the internationalism of the Legion of Honor continued with Napoleon ordering a changing of the award’s

---

421 Bell, 105-106.
423 “Note, 9 juillet 1807,” Correspondance Inédite de Napoléon Ier conservée aux Archives de la
presentation to account for the addition of Holland, the Hanseatic cities, Rome, and Tuscany with France and for the award to extend to those living in these new departments of the French Empire. Soon after, Napoleon demanded the authorization in Russia of its minister at Cagliari’s acceptance of the golden eagle of the Legion of Honor.

Within France, although the vast majority of recipients were soldiers, membership was not limited to soldiers, diplomats, and nobles. After New Year’s Day 1812, for example, Napoleon awarded the Legion of Honour to Benjamin Delessert for his sugar-beet factory in Paris.

By the French Empire’s height, the names of the various vessels of the French fleet also represented a mixture of national and supranational great contemporaries and ancient legends. Just as the subject of ballets in imperial France centered on such historical figures as Pandora and Achilles, we similarly see the memory of non-French ancient heroes in the names of such ships as l’Achille, la Pénélope (wife of Odysseus),

---

426 Guerrini, 253.
427 Cambacérès wrote to Napoleon regarding these ballets at some length. See “N° 214, 18 avril 1805,” Lettres inédites à Napoléon 1802-1814, Tome I Janvier 1802-Juillet 1807 (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1973), 211.
l’Andromaque (wife of Hector), and l’Iphigénie (daughter of Agamemnon) with other vessels named after the Roman god Neptune and goddess Diana or Josephine’s daughter Hortense, and even after St. Bernard, as well as after Roman emperors Caesar and Trajan (the latter Napoleon wanted ready on his birthday). Naming ships after the wife of the man who went on a famous odyssey around the Mediterranean or the Roman god of the sea seems nothing too out of the ordinary; however, one hardly thinks of Diana, Hortense, or Trajan for their naval victories. Other ships include names for French specific heroes including Louis XIII’s admiral Abraham Duquesne (c. 1610-1688) and Bertrand du Guesclin the Eagle of Brittany (c. 1320-1380).

Meanwhile, Napoleon’s building projects for Paris included a “who’s who” of great men and women as the names of a variety of public works, such as the Church of St-Napoléon beside and to the east of the Pavillon Colbert, restoration work on the

439 Guerrini, 414.
Church of Ste-Geneviève from 1806 to 1812,\textsuperscript{440} the Fontaine de Mars at the Rue St-Dominique from 1806 to 1809,\textsuperscript{441} the Marché St-Jean from 1812 to 1815, the Marché St-Germain from 1813 to 1815, the Marché St-Martin, the Marché St-Joseph,\textsuperscript{442} the rue Caffarelli completed in 1809, the rue Clotaire completed from 1805 to 1807, the rue Clotilde completed from 1805 to 1807, the rue Clovis completed from 1807 to 1809, the rue de Constantine completed in 1807, the Rue Kléber completed in 1808,\textsuperscript{443} the rue de Montesquieu completed in 1802, the rue St-Elisabeth completed in 1807, the rue St-Elisabeth completed in 1807, the rue de Sully completed in 1807, the Quai Desaix completed from 1803 to 1806, the Quai Napoléon completed from 1803 to 1813,\textsuperscript{444} and extensions to the Lycée Bonaparte and the Lycée Charlemagne.\textsuperscript{445} Those Napoleon attempted (some of these buildings were either never completed or were since destroyed) to immortalize included himself, a Greek god, a Bourbon minister, various male and female saints, members of the Merovingian royal family, military heroes from the French Consulate, and Roman emperors.

Napoleon honored himself as well as French soldiers and legislators alike from before and during his reign in a pagan Greco-Roman fashion. An exhibition at the Louvre in October 1807 featured 50 statues, 80 busts, 193 bronzes, and many paintings by great masters captured during the campaign of 1806 to 1807 as well as a “colossal bust of Napoleon wearing his crown…The exhibition attracted a large attendance.”\textsuperscript{446} On 26
November 1808, Napoleon explained to Cambacérès, “I have raised a monument to the glory of the Grand Armée at the Madeleine. The Legislature must now erect on the heights of Montmartre a kind of temple of Janus…” By 1810, Napoleon declared that he wanted “this building to be as remarkable in size and shape as the Temple of Minerva at Athens’…The façade of the Legislature already wore its modern appearance—thirty feet wide steps flanked by two allegorical figures of Minerva and Themis and four famous legislators, Michel de l’Hôpital, Sully, Colbert and d’Aguesseau.” Thus, in the Imperial Phase, whether it be through interring in the Panthéon, receiving the Legion of Honor, or even having a ship or monument named after them, at various moments, both contemporary and legendary heroes from both French and broader European history received recognition as members of the Napoleonic cult of great men.

Moreover, Napoleon’s closest collaborators whom he elevated to positions of great influence and consequence worked as great Europeans and not just great Frenchmen. In Owen Connelly’s words, among Napoleon’s administration were men who suppressed their sense of nationality to labor for the empire - for Europe. Reinhard, born a German, trained in the French bureaucracy, served Napoleon in Switzerland, Moldavia, and elsewhere, but also, without losing pride in his origins, maintained a purely imperial outlook as French ambassador to Westphalia. The Piedmontese Prina managed the finances of Italy. The Corsican-French Ferri-Pisani worked in Naples and later Spain. Pierre-Louis Roederer, the model of Frenchman turned imperial civil servant, reformed the finances of Naples and administered the Grand Duchy of Berg. All saw themselves as functionaries of a European government, at home anywhere in Europe. They were Europeans the like of whom would not be seen for a century.449

447 As quoted in Ibid., 206.
448 Ibid., 230.
As these figures suggest, for Napoleon, in the case of the Grand Empire as was the case for his Enlightenment predecessors, the concept of “great men” at some moments has a European rather than national dimension.

Throughout the remainder of his career and thus in the post-Republican phases, Napoleon continued to write and comment on famous men from antiquity and the Enlightenment. Curiously, on the day after his coronation in December 1804, in a distancing from the Enlightenment, Napoleon lamented:

I have come too late; men are too enlightened; there is nothing great left to do … Look at Alexander; after he had conquered Asia and been proclaimed to the peoples as the son of Jupiter, the whole of the East believed it … with the exception of Aristotle and some Athenian pedants. Well, as for me, if I declared myself today that son of the eternal Father, there is no fishwife who would not hiss at me as I passed by.  

While the lingering admiration for Alexander seems consistent with Napoleon’s other statements, this passage is strange in his disappointment on the achievements of the Enlightenment and apparent lack of belief that what he could and would accomplish subsequently would be great enough. Regardless of the brief moment of regret, Napoleon rapidly went about continuing to spread ideas from the Enlightenment and to attach himself to the ranks of Alexander and other great men of the past. In June 1806, Napoleon approved the Minister of the Interior’s request that a bronze statue of General Desaix, whom Napoleon earlier referred to as his Hephaestion, be executed.  


\footnote{Alexander had earlier honored Hephestion with “the most expensive cremation in history! (Babylon) Hephestion, the dearest friend of Alexander the Great, was cremated in 323 B.C. on a Pyre on which the monarch piled gold ingots, precious jewels, ivory, rare spices and fabrics valued at $12,000,000.” Ed. Edward Meyer, \textit{Ripley’s Believe It or Not!} 34 (Toronto: Ripley Books, 1982), 168.}
1807, Napoleon approved 20,000 kilograms of bronze be used for the project.\textsuperscript{453} By 1808, heavy “mortars, part of the artillery captured during the Prussian campaign, were…melted down for the statue of General Desaix in the Place des Victoires.”\textsuperscript{454} He also continued to revive previously abolished traditions of awarding contemporary heroes or men of talent with the Legion of Honor, the marshal’s baton, and titles of nobility.

The history of the Marshals of France, a title used by many a French king, but abolished by the National Convention in 1793, also shows the gradual move from republicanism toward imperialism. When Napoleon revived the title in 1804, he recognized the eighteen greatest living French generals. These great military men gained new grandiose titles and nicknames as they commanded the forces of the Great Army from 1805 onwards. André Masséna, whom Napoleon described as “the greatest name of my military,” earned the nickname “the dear child of victory” and the titles of Duke of Rivoli and Prince of Essling.\textsuperscript{455} In short, Masséna, like many other Marshals of France soon held Italian and German titles of nobility. Moreover, when Napoleon’s brother King Louis the Good of Holland since 1806, who also became Constable of France in 1808, attempted to create Dutch marshals, Napoleon overruled his brother arguing that there would be no national marshals for the satellite kingdoms. In time non-Frenchmen who served the Great Army could in theory become marshals, as happened in 1813 to

\textsuperscript{454} Ibid., 189.
\textsuperscript{455} General Michel Franceschi (Ret.), \textit{Austerlitz} (Montreal: International Napoleonic Society, 2005), 20.
Polish Prince Józef Antoni Poniatowski (1763-1813). Thus, by 1813, great politicians, regardless of nationality, could sit in the French Senate; great men of various talents, regardless of nationality, could be interred in the Parisian Panthéon; and great generals, regardless of nationality, could become Marshals of France.

Napoleon and the Cult of French Heroes

That is not to suggest that Napoleon did not frequently allude to great Frenchmen or that French intellectual giants of the nineteenth century failed to see Napoleon as a “French” hero. After all, in 1809, Napoleon explained to his brother Louis, “I identify myself with all French history, from Clovis to the Committee of Public Safety.”\(^{456}\)

Napoleon’s interest in French history persisted even late in his reign. As late as 1811, Napoleon continued to support leading French historians of France, including Pierre-Édouard Lemontey and Abbé Halma.\(^{457}\) Natalis Damay (1795-1872) presented an ideal picture of the ultimate aims of Bonapartism; as in 1815, he said, to rally to the Emperor was to declare oneself against a static and repressive ancient régime, and for a system whose possibilities for development were limitless. Bonapartism was the only possible framework for French culture and French politics. Its cultural side was expressed by the essentially Bonapartist institution of the université which Napoleon I had founded to be the instrument for reconciling the France of 1572 with the France of the Revolution….he quoted the most Saint-Simonian passages from the Idées napoléoniennes of 1839—the Napoleonic idea ‘inspires agriculture, invents new manufactures…levels mountains, crosses streams, facilitates communications, and obliges all nations to


\(^{457}\) Holtman, 169.
be at peace’...Universal scientific education would reconcile the classes divided by hostile and untenable creeds…

Damas, who lived through the French First Empire, seized upon the non-militaristic scientific and educational goals of Napoleon I as what made him a French hero. Napoleon continued to refer to non-military figures from French history as “great men.” For example, in a conversation with Cardinal Maury in 1807, Napoleon argued with the cardinal who preferred Racine to Corneille that Corneille was “a great man” precisely because at “a distance from the court, from intrigues, and from business, he guessed as it were the true situations of empires, sovereigns, and people.”

As we saw with the Republican Napoleon, the Imperial Napoleon continued to promote the memory of artists and writers, while occasionally also promoting the cult of French kings as models of leadership and as predecessors to his new dynasty.

Napoleon tried to inspire the French populace by alluding to national heroes in his first year as emperor of the French. For example, he sat in a throne allegedly used by Dagobert and appropriated medieval symbols such as the bees of Childeric I, the father of Clovis, and the Carolingian eagle for his seal and as symbols of imperial France. Although not imperial, the traditions established by the French monarchy also influenced the development of the Napoleonic cult of great men during the Empire. In addition to

---

460 Blond, 31.
461 Wilson-Smith, Napoleon: Man of War, Man of Peace, 162.
462 Napoleon Bonaparte, Correspondance de Napoléon I, Vol. XVI (1854-69), 13735; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, “Official History: Note for M. Cretet, Minister for Home Affairs” in Napoleon's
the nepotism with which Napoleon elevated his brothers that mimicked the habits of the
defunct monarchy, Napoleon also decreed that the emperors of the French would be
entombed along with the former kings of France within the Church of St. Denis to
indicate that the Bonaparte family served as the fourth royal line of France. In 1806,
when Napoleon decided to restore the necropolis of the kings of France in Saint-Denis as
the future resting place for the emperors of the French of the nation’s “fourth dynasty,”
he thereby evoked, in his words, a “monument which dates […] of Loraine even of the
nation, that Dagobert dedicated to the guard of France, which to some extent contains, in
his centre, the very whole history of this Empire.” Of course, Merovingian and
Carolingian France included more than France, and was an empire. Thus, Napoleon,
whose dynasty officially succeeded “the Merovingians, Carolingians and Capetians,”
could appear as an almost heroic figure to all types of French people. In a letter to the
pope also from 1806, Napoleon calculatingly wrote: “I have always considered myself
like my Valois and Bourbon predecessors, as the eldest son of the Church.”

---

Napoleon Bonaparte, Volume 9 & 10, 71. Oddly enough, the French Revolution almost resulted in a
Bourbon, rather than Bonapartist empire. During the Fête de la Fédération, Deputy Villette suggested “that
Louis XVI be proclaimed Emperor of the French by the nation, just as Charlemagne had been—so he
claimed—a thousand years earlier.” Thierry Lentz, “Napoleon and Charlemagne,” Member’s Bulletin of

Napoleon Bonaparte, “Decree Regulating the Purpose of the Churches of Saint Denis and Saint
Geneviève, February 20, 1806” in A Documentary Survey of Napoleonic France: A Supplement (New

Napoleon called it a “monument qui date […] de Loraine même de la nation, que Dagobert
dédia au protecteur de la France, qui renferme en quelque sorte, dans son sein, l’histoire tout entière de cet
Empire.” See Jacques-Olivier Boudon, Napoléon et les Cultes: Les religions en Europe à l’aube du XIXe

Rowe, 89.

Napoleon Bonaparte, Correspondance de Napoléon I, publié par ordre de l’Empereur
Napoléon III, Vol. XI (Paris, 1854-64), 9655; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, “Emperor and Pope: (1) Direct
To His Holiness the Pope” in Napoleon’s Letters (London: Prion Books, 1998), edited by J. M. Thompson,
By adopting some of the attributes and style of the monarchy, Napoleon appealed to notable servants of the old regime. Even Jean-Louis Fargeon, Marie-Antoinette’s perfumer who later joined the National Guard during the Revolution and created perfumes for the Directory, ended his career by creating perfumes for Napoleon’s court until Fargeon’s death in 1806. Napoleon distributed the Legion of Honor to artists whose careers began under the monarchy, including Gros, at the Salon of 1808. Accordingly, his grateful artists depicted or represented him, not so much as an artist, but as a patron of art in the manner of the kings of old. François Gérard placed Napoleon with France’s greatest kings, St. Louis, Francis I, and Louis XIV, on a ceiling in the Musée Napoléon. Napoleon’s plan on moving into Versailles further demonstrates the influence of the French monarchy on Napoleon’s conception of how he should rule, just as the naming of his brother as king of Spain mirrors the Bourbon family having rulers on the thrones of France and Spain simultaneously during the time of Louis XIV, whom Napoleon praised as the greatest French king “since Charlemagne.”

Napoleon commented frequently, though not always with praise, on the reigns of

117.

468 Prendergast, 7.
469 Ibid., 2.
470 The dissolution of his empire prevented the realization of this plan.
471 In France and Latin-American Independence, William Spence Robertson explains how Talleyrand proposed that Napoleon should place a brother on the Spanish throne in imitation of Louis XIV. See William Spence Robertson, France and Latin-American Independence (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1939), 25; see also, Wilson-Smith, 34.
472 Interestingly enough, he rejected such a comparison when politically unpopular, which demonstrates how all these diverse appropriations suggest an effort to be all things to all people. Napoleon Bonaparte, “Précis des guerres de Turenne,” Correspondance de Napoléon Ier, publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Vol. XXXII (1858-70), 146; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, “Dictation, c. 1820,” The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from his Written and Spoken Words, 60.
important French kings, especially Henry IV and Louis XIV.\textsuperscript{473} The Fourteenth Bulletin of the Grand Army announced:

Contrary to all reasons of policy and motives humanity, the enemy does all in its power to starve their fellow-citizens and this city [Vienna], although it contains their wives and children. How different is this from the conduct of our Henry IV, who supplied a city then hostile to us, and besieged by him, with provisions?\textsuperscript{474}

This represents a change from the disparagement of Henry IV in 1804. For Napoleon, as his reign progressed, Henry IV was one of the few great French kings worth promoting as a predecessor. Napoleon inscribed on a monument to Henry IV: “Great men rejoice in the glory of those who resemble them,”\textsuperscript{475} and Napoleon even publicly used Charlemagne and Henry IV’s marriage policies as justification for his divorce from Josephine.\textsuperscript{476}

When “Napoleon divorced Josephine and married Marie-Louise,” he also imitated Louis XIV by wearing “a glittering \textit{habit habillé} of crimson velvet with elaborate gold embroidery.”\textsuperscript{477} Later, in 1811, while at the height of power, Napoleon explained,

\begin{quote}
I had done no more than arrange that [until the important question of canonical institution is decided] the bishops I had nominated should function as \textit{vicaires capitulaires} in the name of their Chapters; this is in accordance with church tradition, and follows the precedent laid down by Louis XIV and other European sovereigns.\textsuperscript{478}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{473} Napoleon Bonaparte, “Dictation, c. 1820,” \textit{The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from his Written and Spoken Words}, 59-60.


\textsuperscript{476} Bonaparte, \textit{Napoleon’s Letters to Josephine, 1796-1812}, 296.

\textsuperscript{477} Philip F. Riley, “Review of Dressed to Rule: Royal and Court Costume from Louis XIV to Elizabeth II,” \textit{The Historian} 69.3 (Fall, 2007): 587.

In 1811 around the time of the church council Napoleon called, he directly refers to Francis I’s concordat with Leo X as a precedent for Napoleon’s concordat.\textsuperscript{479} That same year, Napoleon supported continuing the example of communication between ministers and officers as it was under Louis XIV.\textsuperscript{480} He continued writing on Louis XIV that season with regards to ministerial matters,\textsuperscript{481} and also wrote of Louis XIII and Louis XIV’s achievements with Versailles while discussing projects to complete the palace for Napoleon’s use.\textsuperscript{482} Yet, on 13 January 1809, Napoleon contrasted himself with Louis XIV who “‘was busy having Versailles and hunting-lodges built. We have busied ourselves with improving Paris, its water supply, its palaces, its markets, its Temple of Glory, its Bourse.’”\textsuperscript{483} Of course, Napoleon did not put the blame solely on the “great” king. In Autumn 2009, Napoleon noted further that architects “‘ruined Louis XIV.’”\textsuperscript{484} Nevertheless, Napoleon identified areas where one of the king’s ministers deserved recognition for an achievement rather than the king. For example, around 1810,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{479} “Instructions pour M. l’Archevêque de Tours et Mm. les évêques de Nantes et de Trèves, 26 avril 1811,” \textit{Correspondance de Napoléon I\textsuperscript{er} publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Tome Vingt-Deuxième} (Paris: Henri Plon et J. Dumaine, 1867), 112. For further references to Francis I and Leo X’s concordat (Napoleon cites both men’s names), see also “Note dictée en conseil des ministres, 4 juillet 1811,” \textit{Correspondance de Napoléon I\textsuperscript{er} publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Tome Vingt-Deuxième} (Paris: Henri Plon et J. Dumaine, 1867), 297; “Note pour le Comité des Évêques, 6 juillet 1811,” \textit{Correspondance de Napoléon I\textsuperscript{er} publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Tome Vingt-Deuxième} (Paris: Henri Plon et J. Dumaine, 1867), 309; and “A Mm. les Évêques députés près du Pape, a Savone, 17 août 1811,” \textit{Correspondance de Napoléon I\textsuperscript{er} publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Tome Vingt-Deuxième} (Paris: Henri Plon et J. Dumaine, 1867), 414.
\item \textsuperscript{480} Napoléon, “Au Maréchal Davout, 10 mai 1811,” \textit{Correspondance de Napoléon I\textsuperscript{er} publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Tome Vingt-Deuxième} (Paris: Henri Plon et J. Dumaine, 1867), 130.
\item \textsuperscript{481} “Au Vice-Amiral Comte Decrés, 19 mai 1811,” \textit{Correspondance de Napoléon I\textsuperscript{er} publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Tome Vingt-Deuxième} (Paris: Henri Plon et J. Dumaine, 1867), 169.
\item \textsuperscript{482} “Note, 12 juillet 1811,” \textit{Correspondance de Napoléon I\textsuperscript{er} publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Tome Vingt-Deuxième} (Paris: Henri Plon et J. Dumaine, 1867), 320-321.
\item \textsuperscript{484} As quoted in ibid., 218.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Napoleon said, “A great deal has been said about the burning of the Palatinate, and our miserable historians still slander Louis XIV on that subject. The glory of that deed does not belong to Louis; it belongs entirely to his minister, Louvois, and it is, in my eyes, the finest action of his life.”\(^485\) Napoleon’s acting as an apologist for the violent actions of monarchic great men recalls the excerpt at the beginning of this chapter when Napoleon tried to explain the execution of the Bourbon Duc d’Enghien. For Napoleon during the years that the Empire prospered, Francis I, Henry IV, Louis XIII, and Louis XIV aided by able ministers represented great kings worth citing as precedents for especially religious matters, but also for military, ministerial, and architectural endeavours.

After 1811, however, Napoleon recognized that Louis XIV was not a true parallel figure to himself. Napoleon explained that “Louis XIV, despite all his earlier victories, would have lost his crown at the end of his life if he had not been the heir of a long line of kings….With me, the stake is always my existence and that of the whole empire.”\(^486\) And that is right. By 1814, this explanation proved prophetic when a string of defeats cost Napoleon his French Empire for the first time.

In March 1815 at Golfe-Juan on France’s Côte d’Azur, a more desperate Napoleon returned to France. Instead of evoking Louis XIV, Napoleon cited the memory of Charles VII restoring a throne of bravery, while disparaging Henry VI’s ephemeral

---


\(^{486}\) Chaptal de Chanteloup, 217-19 as quoted in *The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words*, 241.
throne.\textsuperscript{487} In 1815, Napoleon announced “his resolve to continue” a royalist project “to erect a bronze statue of Henri IV” by explaining “‘I am flattered to see Henri IV thus honoured and I wish to associate myself with the homage paid to a monarch whom France remembers and who, by his courage alone, won the right to command the French and thereafter to make them happy.’”\textsuperscript{488} At this point, Napoleon’s heroes were almost entirely French with only the occasional allusion to some unnamed ancient people appearing in his letters. He wrote that a mayor who supported Napoleon’s return deserved at least the Legion of Honor.\textsuperscript{489} The ministers, for their part, said that Napoleon deserved the title “Father of the fatherland.”\textsuperscript{490} Napoleon in turn referred to the representatives as having “the confidence, the energy and patriotism…like the senate of a great people of antiquity…[my translation].”\textsuperscript{491} Seven days prior to the decisive battle of Waterloo, Napoleon addressed the Chambre des Pairs with references to “great people”, asserting that it “is in these difficult times that the great nations, like the great men, deploy all of their energy and their character and become an object of admiration for posterity [my translation].”\textsuperscript{492}

\textsuperscript{487} Napoléon, “Au Peuple Français, 1\textsuperscript{er} mars 1815,” Correspondance de Napoléon I\textsuperscript{er} publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Tome XXVIII (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1869), 3.
\textsuperscript{489} “Relation de la Marche de Napoléon, 23 mars 1815,” Correspondance de Napoléon I\textsuperscript{er} publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Tome XXVIII (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1869), 16.
\textsuperscript{490} “Extrait du Moniteur, 27 mars 1815,” Correspondance de Napoléon I\textsuperscript{er} publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Tome XXVIII (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1869), 34.
\textsuperscript{491} “Discours de l’Empereur, 7 juin 1815,” Correspondance de Napoléon I\textsuperscript{er} publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Tome XXVIII (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1869), 301-302.
\textsuperscript{492} “Réponse, 11 juin 1815,” Correspondance de Napoléon I\textsuperscript{er} publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Tome XXVIII (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1869), 311.
Napoleon and the Cult of Polish Heroes

Of course for Napoleon, as with the Roman emperors long before him, his empire included various client kingdoms or satellite states for which appeals to the memory of local or national great men would prove useful, just as the appeal to great Frenchmen had worked in France. Although playing a smaller role in his vision of a united Europe than the German and Italian states created and sustained by Napoleon and thus having fewer “great men” to which to allude and emulate, the shorter-lived recreation of a Polish state in the Grand Duchy of Warsaw cannot be ignored, because the possibility of a French sponsored resurrected Polish kingdom greatly exacerbated tensions with Russia that would signal Napoleon’s downfall, and had historic connections with both the Holy Roman Empire and the Kingdom of France.493

The cordial relationship between the French and the Poles went back at least to the sixteenth century when the third son of French king Henry II left France to become King Henryk Walezy of Poland494 and later with King Louis XV’s court in the eighteenth century when the king of France married a Polish princess and John Sobieski married a French princess, as Louis XV’s “secrets of The King” favored Poland. Napoleon later counted Sobieski’s sabre among Napoleon’s personal arms.495 According to Vincent

493 This Polish kingdom, as proposed by Napoleon, would have been considerably larger than the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. For example, Napoleon explained to Caulaincourt that Poland “must have Danzig, and a coastline.” See de Caulaincourt, With Napoleon in Russia: the memoirs of General de Caulaincourt, Duke of Vicenza, 295.
494 He later left Poland to become king Henry III of France.
495 Napoleon as quoted in Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte: To which are Added an Account of the Important Events of the Hundred Days, of Napoleon’s Surrender to the English, and of His Residence and Death at St. Helena, with Anecdotes and Illustrative Extracts from
Cornin, “While Marie told him about Polish heroes: Mieszko, who had crushed the
Germans, and Jagiello, whom Napoleon himself admired, he spoke to her approvingly
of…” 496 When Napoleon also said he “greatly wished…to make the acquaintance of the
hero of the North,” Kosciuszko replied, “And I…am happy to see the conqueror of…” 497

With French already the language of the Polish nobility, Napoleon hoped to
capitalize on the traditional friendship between Poles and the French and reestablish the
historic tie between the Saxons and the Poles. In 1807, Napoleon created the Grand
Duchy of Warsaw as a possible precursor to a Polish Kingdom within a Northern
Confederation with Napoleon as protector and placed the grand duchy under the rule of
King Friedrich Augustus I the Just of Saxony, the great-grandson of Poland’s king
Friedrich Augustus I the Strong, who had also served as supreme commander of the Holy
Roman Empire’s army. 498 Like his grandfather, Friedrich Augustus III held the imperial
electorship of Saxony from 1763 until 1806, when Napoleon elevated the Saxon elector’s
status to that of King Friedrich Augustus I of Saxony.

Such supranational policies as those discussed above, which Napoleon
progressively applied throughout the Grand Empire, created a host of new opportunities
for Europeans outside their traditional national boundaries, as further illustrated by the
honoring of Joseph Poniatowski, brother of the last Polish king, as a marshal of the
French Empire. As it turned out, however, the Napoleonic adventure proved short-lived.

All the Most Authentic Sources, ed. R. W. Phipps (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1889), 425.
496 Vincent Cronin, Napoleon Bonaparte: An Intimate Biography (1972), 280.
497 As quoted in Mary Corbridge-Patkaniewska and Monica Mary Gardner, Kościuszko: A
Biography (1942), 129.
498 Fedosova, 49.
After Napoleon’s defeat, the Congress of Vienna destroyed the Grand Duchy in 1815 and Poland became tied with Russia for the duration of the next century, although the connection between the Napoleonic Era and the development of Polish nationalism persisted over the succeeding centuries, as immortalized in the Polish national anthem, which actually mentions Bonaparte by name! Nevertheless, Napoleon’s inclusion of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw as a member of the Confederation of the Rhine with the Saxon king as grand duke also represents one of many influences of policies enacted by specific Holy Roman emperors, yet another group of “great” leaders Napoleon admired and imitated.

Napoleon and the Cult of Medieval and Early modern “Roman” Emperors

Napoleon also copied certain policies and traditions of the various revivals of the Roman Empire in the nearly two thousand years between the death of Augustus and the coronation of Napoleon, including that of Charlemagne, which indicates that Napoleon intended his empire to surpass all previous European empires. Napoleon’s conception and manipulation of the cult of Medieval and Early modern “Roman” emperors is indicative of his and his supporters’ shift from republicanism to imperialism. For Napoleon, those aspects most admirable in great men of the past oftentimes blended the

---

499 For more on the historic relationship of Poland with France and Saxony, see Christopher Blackburn’s dissertation and Norman Davies, God’s Playground: A History of Poland (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

500 For more on the comparison between Napoleon and Charlemagne and the ways in which Napoleon presented himself as Charlemagne’s successor, see Thierry Lentz, “Napoleon and Charlemagne”
political and religious worlds. For example, Napoleon used Charles V’s actions as justification and precedents for an emperor’s relationship with the papacy. Napoleon explained how, “Philip the Fair had Boniface arrested, Charles V kept Clement VII in prison for a long period, and those popes had done less to deserve it.”\(^{501}\) By citing the actions of both a French king and a Holy Roman emperor as legal precedent for some of Napoleon’s most significant political interventions, Napoleon placed himself within the traditions of both the French nation and the broader imperial lineage of Europe. In order to understand Napoleon’s motivations in this regard, we must keep in mind that while Napoleon approached great men as an admirer and utilitarian, he approached religion as a cynical and utilitarian:

> When a man is dying of hunger alongside another who stuffs himself, it is impossible to make him accede to the difference unless there is an authority which says to him, ‘God wishes it thus; there must be some poor and some rich in the world, but hereafter and for all eternity the division will be made differently.’\(^{502}\)

So, Napoleon who used religion and the “universal Church” in particular and imposed “one catechism for all of France,” declared that God gave Napoleon, i.e. Caesar, to the French and established him as their sovereign.\(^{503}\)

> Thus, it was fitting that the pope should bless Napoleon’s coronation on 2 December 1804, just as Pope Clement VII had done at Emperor Charles V’s coronation at Bologna in 1530 four centuries before Napoleon’s ceremony.\(^{504}\) In 1804 and after,

---


\(^{502}\) Holtman, 123-124.

\(^{503}\) Ibid., 130

\(^{504}\) In her memoirs, the Duchesse d’Abrantès reminisces on how her husband “was to carry one of
Napoleon and his supporters saw and deliberately established Napoleon as a new version of another Roman Emperor named Charles, i.e. Charlemagne, the Frankish leader of a papally sanctioned empire that also included Germans and Italians. In his memoirs, C-F de Méneval, for example, outrightly calls Napoleon “the new Charlemagne” and compares Napoleon’s coronation and the role of the pope in it to that of Charlemagne and Leo III. Before Napoleon’s quarrel with the pope, the Papacy had even suggested that he imitate Charlemagne. Napoleon agreed and at his coronation two years earlier, he carried regalia that were “supposed to have been carried by Charlemagne at his coronation.”

This historic event occurred on 2 December 1804, when Pius VII attended Napoleon’s coronation in Paris. His coronation borrowed from previous regal and imperial coronations. By crowning himself with Charlemagne’s crown, Napoleon annoyed Holy Roman Emperor Francis II, Charlemagne’s legitimate heir and a member of the Habsburg family to which Charles V belonged. Medallions even appeared depicting Napoleon wearing the laurel wreath crown of the Caesars in the foreground with Charlemagne behind him. Nevertheless, the ceremony did not include all of the traditional sacramental rites of these earlier events, thereby meaningfully indicating a

---

decrease in the papal role in consecrating the new emperor. Furthermore, although Leo III had crowned Charlemagne in December 800, Napoleon, who had already met the pope on equal terms, crowned himself during his coronation rather than allowing the pope to retain this millennium old honor. While this action could be a manifestation of Napoleon’s Enlightenment beliefs that downgraded the authority of the pope or part of a nineteenth century liberal movement, it is accepted by scholars that this ground-breaking act symbolically meant that Napoleon owed his power directly to divine authority and not through the mediacy of the pope.

Figure 4. Jacques-Louis David’s painting depicting Napoleon crowning Empress

---

509 For a visual example of one such medallion, see Markham, *Napoleon for Dummies*, 308.
510 Rémond, 48.
511 For more on Napoleon’s decision to crown himself, see J. David Markham, *Napoleon’s Road to Glory*, 159-160.
512 Ibid., 128.
Josephine during the 1804 coronation ceremony.

The one moment most famously memorialized artistically from the long ceremony depicts Napoleon dressed like a Roman emperor with his back to the pope - the head of the most powerful religious institution in all of Europe - as Napoleon prepares to crown his empress. Napoleon’s chief artist Jacques-Louis David prepared two identical mammoth paintings to be hung in the Louvre and in Versailles, respectively, which present Napoleon in this manner as a notably more robust and significant figure than the seated Pius VII. From an idealistic and propagandistic point of view, this selection of the official paintings’ content is quite revealing of Napoleon’s belief in the Church’s subservience to the Empire, as well as of Napoleon’s visual representation of himself in a greater European context, and the lengths to which he went to remind his subjects of these distinctions.

As the Emperor, not king, of the French, Napoleon shared this identification of himself with Frankish King and Roman Emperor Charlemagne. In 1804, Napoleon visited Charlemagne’s capital at Aachen, where past generations had elected and crowned many of Charlemagne’s successors. During Napoleon’s visit to Aix-la-Chapelle before his coronation, he read and annotated a copy of Gabriel Bonnot de Mably’s *Observations sur l’histoire de France*. Napoleon was influenced by both Mably and Rollin. Mably was great for Charlemagne and Rollin for Romans, but both had a distinctively

---

513 See Fig. 3.
514 Both mentioned in Dr. Van Kley’s letters of communion and Gallican history article.
constitutionalist and proto-republican bias.\textsuperscript{515} Napoleon’s supporters, Mentelle, Portalis, and Louis Dubroca, who wrote on \textit{Napoléon-le-Grand} in 1806, subscribed to Mably’s suggestion “that religious consecration and divine right were later additions to these more primitive forms of French monarchy” under the Merovingians and Carolingians, i.e. the idea of elective kingship “based on a compact with the People.”\textsuperscript{516} According to the Duchesse d’Abrantès:

When, in 1804, the French Senate offered Napoleon a crown, it was careful, at his secret orders, to make him, not a king because that would have smacked of the ancien régime, but an emperor, a title which, like that of Consul, was connected to ancient Rome. What quickly became clear, however, was that Napoleon did not think of himself as a new Augustus: instead, he chose to see the Empire as a modern re-edition of Charlemagne’s. . . . all Europe was to be united under the new Emperor’s sceptre.\textsuperscript{517}

Napoleon understood the precedent for European unity associated with Charlemagne.\textsuperscript{518} Even Napoleon’s brother Lucien wrote of Charlemagne who “can only calm the evils of the universe [my translation],”\textsuperscript{519} while the Austrian noble Colloredo warned that Napoleon “sought to become a new Charlemagne and aspired to ‘universal Monarchy.’”\textsuperscript{520}

When Napoleon was crowned with the iron crown of Lombardy,\textsuperscript{521} he gave the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[1]{Dr. Van Kley, “re: note,” Thursday, September 20, 2007 10:43 am.}
\footnotetext[2]{Prendergast, 36-37.}
\footnotetext[3]{Laure Junot, \textit{At the Court of Napoleon: Memoirs of the Duchesse d’Abrantès} (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 287.}
\footnotetext[4]{Ellis, 228; Pierre Riché, \textit{The Carolingians: A Family Who Forged Europe} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 140.}
\footnotetext[6]{Kagan, 209.}
\footnotetext[7]{Charlemagne’s title included that of king of the Lombards.}
\end{footnotes}
city a painting of Charlemagne as a gift to coincide with this second coronation. In 1805, rather than destroy the Holy Roman Empire after Austerlitz, “he may have flirted with the idea of taking Charlemagne’s crown for himself…” Such flirtations were not mere Napoleonic musings that would have been universally ill-received had he acted on his ideas; Archchancellor Theodor von Dalberg of the empire “suggested to Napoleon that if he promised to save the empire’s constitution, a grateful Germany would present him with the crown.” Four years later, a portrait of Napoleon was put on display in a medieval imperial hall in Charlemagne’s former capital.

That same year, in 1809, Napoleon told some papal representatives to take “a good look at me. In me you see Charlemagne. I am Charlemagne, me! Yes, I am Charlemagne!” In August 1811, Napoleon again wrote of “restoring the throne of Charlemagne,” this time claiming because “Providence” wanted him to do so. Later that year, he traveled for at least two days on board the Charlemagne. Even Napoleon’s architectural vision included resurrecting Charlemagne’s plan for a canal linking the Meuse River with the Rhine. Finally, Napoleon was “willing to revive the high nobility and recreate the twelve peers of Charlemagne, intended to give additional

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{522} Kagan, 630.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{523} Ibid., 652.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{524} Michael Rowe, From Reich to State: The Rhineland in the Revolutionary Age, 1789-1830 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 154-155.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{525} As quoted in Craig M. White, In Search of ... The Great German Nation: Origins and Destiny (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2007), 176.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{528} Rowe, 153.}\]
lustre to his twenty-four grand dignitaries of the Empire, which however should be the just reward of their services…”

Thus, we see Napoleon used the example of Charlemagne not just to aggrandize himself, but also for how to reward Napoleon’s contemporaries.

Twenty-first century historian Michael Rowe elaborates on how the residents of Aachen in particular supported this renewed imperial patronage by Napoleon. Rowe revealingly states, “Celebrations marking the baptism of the King of Rome in Aachen in 1811 included the parading around the city of an effigy of Charlemagne, on which was inscribed (in French and German), ‘I am only surpassed by Napoleon’.”

By alluding to Charlemagne, Napoleon also claimed to rule as the monarch of Western Europe. That Napoleon would use a symbol that had multinational dimensions over ones tied to the royal family of just one country reveals that Napoleon’s cult of great men included someone like Charlemagne who was simultaneously a French and German hero.

Charlemagne’s empire had produced the foundations of France and the Holy Roman Empire, as well as the relationships that the papacy would have with these two political entities. Napoleon’s success in crushing Austria at Austerlitz in 1805, as well as Prussia at Jena and Auerstädt in 1806, demonstrated to Napoleon and his contemporaries that he could decide the fate of Germany and restore the empire of Charlemagne.


Ibid., 155.

The comparison of Napoleon with Charlemagne had an unintended negative connotation later in Napoleon’s reign, when in 1813, Russian General Ludwig Wittgenstein reminded the Saxons that, “Charles the Great was his name. He made war on you. Wittkind was your King. He did not urge you to keep still . . .” See Napoleon Bonaparte, *The Letters of Napoleon to Marie-Louise* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1935), 138.
Indeed, in 1806 Karl Theodor Anton Maria von Dalberg, Archbishop-Elector of Mainz and Arch-Chancellor of the Holy Roman Empire, “saw one way of saving the Holy Roman Empire—by offering the crown to Napoleon. This desperate remedy he pursued by desperate means.” Although Napoleon ended up taking a different title than Holy Roman emperor, he did hesitate “over the idea for a month or two . . .” and continued to refer to himself in words and imagery as Charlemagne’s successor. In terms of imagery, Napoleon blended Roman and Carolingian symbolism and “used two crowns, one designed to look like Charlemagne’s and the other a gold laurel wreath of the style used by the Roman Caesars.”

Therefore, Jacques-Louis David painted Napoleon, the victor in the continental war against the Second Coalition, as a new Charlemagne. In David’s romantic painting of Napoleon crossing the Alps, the great Carolingian emperor’s name appears at the front left on a stone beneath Napoleon’s horse’s feet, directly implying that Napoleon followed in the path of Charlemagne, who also invaded Italy. Hannibal’s name also appears indicating a different kind of lineage, but more importantly further revealing how Napoleon and his artists presented him as following in the footsteps of many Mediterranean leaders. Regarding Hannibal’s invasion of Italy, Napoleon declared, “No vaster or grander plan was ever carried out by man. . . . Had he marched on, he would have reached Rome in six days and Carthage would have been mistress of the

533 J. David Markham, Napoleon’s Road to Glory: Triumphs, Defeats and Immortality, 159.  
534 Ibid. 30.  
535 See Fig. 3.  
536 Ellis 162.
Nevertheless, Napoleon’s references to Charlemagne are much more numerous than those to Hannibal.

Figure 5. Jacques-Louis David’s portrait of Napoleon crossing the Alps.

Napoleon did not limit himself to strictly French themes, i.e. those focused on French locales and leaders, and instead used these many diverse historic themes of past European glories to visually represent the multifaceted nature of the Grand Empire. It is therefore not surprising that Napoleon would assert that “The battle of Austerlitz was a European victory,” for in 1805, the year of that triumph, the “notion de Grand Empire

---

537 A good deal of Charlemagne’s empire was on the Mediterranean.
succède … à celle de Grande Nation.” Even Napoleon’s soldiers cried, “Long live the Emperor of the West!”

By creating a Kingdom of Italy on 17 March 1805 with himself as its sovereign and his stepson, Eugène de Beauharnais, as its viceroy, and by crowning himself with the iron crown of Lombardy, Napoleon appropriated the Holy Roman emperors’ traditional title of king of Italy, thus adding more salt to the wounded pride of Francis. Although Napoleon had diminished the power of the Habsburg emperor, Napoleon’s marriage to the Habsburg archduchess Marie-Louise made possible the revival of naming an imperial heir the King of Rome, the title of the man elected to the imperial throne of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, before his coronation as emperor.

Napoleon had also considered marrying a Russian princess to demonstrate unity with the heir to the Eastern Roman Empire. This proposal, which the Russians rejected, once again mirrors an unfulfilled project of Charlemagne. Around 800 to 802, Charlemagne hoped to marry Empress Irene of the East Roman Empire to reunite the West Roman Empire of the Franks with the East Roman Empire of the Byzantines, but the Byzantines deposed Irene before she could accept the offer. Napoleon’s secretary Bourrienne actually mentioned Empress Irene’s proposal to Charlemagne in Napoleon’s memoirs. Nonetheless, Napoleon’s actual marriage meant that his son enjoyed descent

---

540 Jean Tulard, *Dictionnaire Napoléon*.
542 Markham, *Napoleon’s Road to Glory*, 189.
from the first emperor of the French and the last Holy Roman emperor, indicating that Napoleon II would reign as a truly European emperor. Although Napoleon did not take the title of Holy Roman Emperor, he did grant his son the title of King of Rome.

By 1806, with “Prussia as well as Austria crushed” and even before the birth of the King of Rome, Napoleon dominated the lands that would become Germany and began to see himself as capable of restoring “the Empire of Charlemagne.” At this point, Napoleon blended his promotion of great Frenchmen as a means of inspiring his French subjects with more European great men from antiquity and the middle ages. On 14 May 1806, Napoleon wrote:

The Minister of the Interior is having another triumphal arch built in the Place de l’Étoile. It is essential that all the designs should conform to the same general description. One of the first two must be a Marengo arch, and the other an arch of Austerlitz. I shall have another erected somewhere in Paris, to be the arch of Peace, and a fourth to be the arch of Religion. With these four arches I am confident that I can finance French sculpture for 20 years. But it is as well that M. Daru should know of the existence of all four arches, so that he may not put work into one that is only suitable for another.

Will M. Daru please let me know on which of the arches the statue of Charlemagne has been placed? Will he also come to agreement with M. Cretet on the subject of the two fountains which are to be erected, one in the Place de la Révolution, and the other on the site of Bastille? They are of a monumental character, and ought to have statues and bas-reliefs: the subjects for these can be taken in the first instance from the Emperor’s life, and afterwards from the history of the Revolution, and of France. Generally speaking, no opportunity should be missed to humiliate the Russians and the English. William the Conqueror and Duguesclin may be given places of honour on these monuments.

---

By connecting himself and his son to the great lineage of the revived Roman Empire, a supranational political entity that lasted for over a thousand years, Napoleon increased his praising of historic individuals that he could be seen as succeeding.

Nevertheless, not all of the actions of the Medieval and Early modern “Roman” Emperors could be imitated or cited as precedents, a lesson sometimes lost on Napoleon during his reign. In a manner reminiscent of emperors embroiled in the investiture controversy of the Middle Ages, Napoleon regarded the pope in a subordinate position to the emperor and to “diplomats Pius VII was already gaining the nickname of imperial chaplain.” Thus, Napoleon’s relationship with Pius did not retain the positive parallel with Charlemagne and Leo for long. Napoleon remembered how during his early education, he read about Charlemagne’s invasion of Italy in order to save Pope Leo III from the Lombards, and so Napoleon described his role as Charlemagne’s successor when dealing with the papacy, noting, “I am Charlemagne, the sword of the Church and their Emperor. . . . I am informing the pope of my plans in a few words. If he does not acquiesce, I shall reduce him to the same status that he held before Charlemagne.” Correspondingly, Napoleon rather distorted history by using Charlemagne as official justification for his eventual annexation of Rome to the French Empire. In 1809, 

---

546 The more reflective Defeated Napoleon acknowledged great leaders’ failing more effectively as we shall see in the next chapter.
547 Ibid., 492.
548 For a brief overview of Napoleon’s relationship with Pius, see Peter M. Friedman, “Napoleon and the Pope: The Separation of Church and State,” First Empire: The International Magazine for the Napoleonic Enthusiast, Historian and Gamer 95 (July/August, 2007): 15-18.
550 Napoleon Bonaparte, Correspondance de Napoléon Ier, publiée par ordre de l’Empereur
Napoleon, with words closely paralleling those in a letter that he sent to the empire’s bishops that same year, decreed,

On the grounds that, even when Charlemagne, Emperor of the French and our august predecessor, made the gift of several counties to the Bishops of Rome, he gave them only title in fiefdom and for the good of his states and that, by this gift, Rome did not cease to be part of his Empire.

As Napoleon explained to his uncle: “As far as the pope is concerned, I am Charlemagne, for like Charlemagne I have united the crowns of France and Lombardy, and my Empire extends to the borders of the Orient.”

Napoleon would eventually rule more European territory than that ruled by either Charlemagne or Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who not only represents one of the major figures from the Renaissance in Napoleon’s cult of great men, but who also ruled Spain and with it South America and Mexico - territories briefly and theoretically under Napoleon’s influence by means of his brother Joseph, the king of Spain and emperor of the Two Americas. Thus, During the Peninsular War, “Napoleon promoted works such as Gasparo Spontini’s Fernand Cortez (1809),” which concerned the Spanish conquest of

---


552 “Two Imperial Decrees, (a) Annexing Rome to the French Empire, and (b) on French governance and administration of Rome; May 17, 1809” in A Documentary Survey of Napoleonic France: A Supplement (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 1996), edited by Eric A. Arnold, 82.


554 Ibid., 242, 253.
Mexico under the reign of Charles V.\textsuperscript{555}

Indeed, Napoleon’s empire included much of what previously made up Charles V’s empire. As such Napoleon evoked the memory of Charles V in various contexts. While in Genoa in 1805, Napoleon made a point of sleeping “in the Doria Palace, in the bed where Charles V had lain.”\textsuperscript{556} In 1810, Napoleon wrote to Berthier about collecting in Paris in a single body the archives of the German Empire, those of the Vatican, of France and of the United Provinces, it may be interesting to search what has become of the archives of Charles V and of Philip II, which would so nicely complete this vast European collection.\textsuperscript{557}

In time Napoleon, who “laid the foundations of his Grand Empire over the dissolved Holy Roman Empire,”\textsuperscript{558} would cite the examples of great French kings and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V as precedents for dealing with the papacy.

In 1806, Napoleon wrote to his brother Joseph:

The court of Rome…think[s] that I cannot reconcile a great respect for the spiritual authority for the Pope with the repression of his pretensions to temporal dominion. They forget that St. Louis, whose piety was undoubted, was almost always at war with the Pope, and that Charles V, who was an eminently Christian prince, long besieged Rome, and ended by taking possession of both the city and of the States of the Church.\textsuperscript{559}

Later, to justify Napoleon’s potential seizure of the pope, Napoleon declared:

If the Pope, against the spirit of his office and of the Gospels, preaches revolt and tries to misuse the immunity of his domicile to have circulars printed, he is to be

\begin{footnotes}
\item[556] Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, \textit{Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte}, ed. R.W. Phipps (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1885), 238.
\item[557] Napoleon, \textit{A Selection from the Letters and Despatches of the First Napoleon: With Explanatory Notes} (Chapman and Hall, limited, 1884).54-55.
\end{footnotes}
arrested . . . Philip the Fair had Boniface arrested, Charles V kept Clement VII in prison for a long period, and those popes had done less to deserve it. 560

In devoutly Catholic Spain, Joachim Napoléon Murat gave a speech to the Madrileños about reminding “those generations to come of the centuries of the great Napoleon and that of Charles V,” 561 Charlemagne’s (Charles I the Great) successor whom at least one flatterer called Charles V the Greatest. 562 To win over the Spanish in colonies conquered during the reign of Charles V, Joseph Bonaparte wrote to his agents in Spanish America “that Napoleon has been sent by God,” “that it would be a mortal sin to resist his will,” and “that their supposed monarch is in the power of the restorer of liberty, of the universal legislator, in a word, Napoleon.” 563 The patriotic connection to arguably one of the three or four most famous and most powerful Spanish kings (and simultaneously Holy Roman Emperor) failed to elicit the reaction Murat intended. And few historians would argue that if anything, imitating Charles V’s actions with Clement VII was not the best attribute of the great Spanish king/Holy Roman emperor to mimic. And as we will soon see, Napoleon perhaps unwittingly also followed in Charles’s footsteps by abdicating his imperial throne with his work largely unfinished and frustrated.

560 Geyl, 100-101. Even with the intensity of Napoleon and Pius’s conflict, for his part, Pius wrote to Metternich about “‘how greatly’ he desired to restore harmony with the emperor,” Napoleon. See Margaret M. O’Dwyer, The Papacy in the Age of Napoleon and the Restoration: Pius VII, 1800-1823 (New York: University Press of America, 1985), 106.

561 Blond, 183.

562 Later in the nineteenth century, Louis Veuillot claimed that “Louis Napoleon would be ‘greater than Charlemagne’; and throughout 1852 the Univers reported each sign of the new era…” Gustave de la Tour wrote, “Even the priest who has little love for the Emperor hopes that he will come to equal Charlemagne and Saint Louis.” See Austin Gough, “The Conflict in Politics: Bishop Pie’s Campaign against the Nineteenth Century,” Conflicts in French Society: Anticlericalism, Education and Morals in the 19th century, ed. Theodore Zeldin (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1970), 140.

Napoleon and the Cult of Frederick the Great

According to Rhinelander like Napoleonic civil servant Karl Ludwig von Keverberg, Napoleon’s efforts at enlightened reform recalled those enacted by Frederick the Great within the framework of the Holy Roman Empire during the mid-eighteenth century.\(^{564}\) Napoleon’s admiration of Frederick resulted in Napoleon’s attempts to collect various items that formerly belonged to the Prussian king. In November 1806, Napoleon authorized the transportation of a marble bust of Frederick II from Berlin to Paris and ordered that an inscription be added on the bust signifying its capture by Napoleon.\(^{565}\) In the same month, he approved the transportation of a little bronze model of a statue of the Great Elector (ancestor of Frederick the Great) from Berlin to France.\(^{566}\) During the campaign against Prussia, Napoleon not surprisingly had Frederick the Great on his mind as seen in several letters exchanged between Napoleon and Cambacérès throughout 1806 and 1807. In these years, Napoleon, Marshal Serrurier, and Cambacérès considered a proposal “concerning the skins of the Great Frederick, that Y.M. appeared to want to deposit in the Invalids,”\(^{567}\) a ceremonial matter which Cambacérès subsequently asked

\(^{564}\) Ibid., 98, 131.
Napoleon to leave to Cambacérès. Napoleon also ordered that the flags, sword, and decorations of Frédéric II be handed over to Les Invalides. Yet, Napoleon’s interest in Frederick the Great, a king, appeared most prominently during the Prussian campaign with the most notable other reference appearing just before Napoleon became Emperor of the French as cited at the start of this chapter. As an Emperor, Napoleon would have more persistent admiration for other emperors.

**Napoleon and the Cult of Roman Emperors**

In 1811, when Napoleon called a council of French, German, and Italian bishops, he wrote,

> The present epoch takes us back to the age of Charlemagne. All the kingdoms, principalities, and duchies which after the breaking up of his empire set themselves up as republics have now been restored under our laws. The Church of my Empire is the Church of the Occident and nearly the universality of Christendom.

> I am resolved to convoke a council of the Western Church, to which I shall summon the bishops of Italy and of Germany, in order to draw up, as has been suggested by many bishops, a general discipline.

---


Despite the reference to Charlemagne in the above quotation, as Felix Markham explains, "Napoleon’s ultimate aim went beyond the pretensions of Charlemagne, to a revival of the Caesaro-Papism of" the Roman emperors Constantine and Theodosius.⁵⁷¹

Subsequently, Napoleon continued his attempts to supersede the pope’s authority by publishing the Imperial Catechism in April 1806, arresting and imprisoning the pope, summoning a national council of French and Italian bishops in Paris in June 1811, and negotiating the Concordat of Fontainebleau on 25 January 1813, which proposed that the pope install himself in Avignon - the official residence of the papacy during the fourteenth century.⁵⁷²

Through these and other actions, Napoleon exploited the Church to glorify himself more than even God—the ultimate great "man." The evidence of Napoleon’s imperial career suggests a building toward ever greater figures with ever greater power and authority. While Napoleon may have alluded to the Christian emperors Charlemagne and Constantine prior to 1812, by that year at the height of the empire, Napoleon saw just about every great Roman consul and emperor as his model, regardless of religion.

Explaining the invasion of Russia, Napoleon said to M. de Narbonne (1755-1813):

Do you not see that I am doing what Marius did, eighteen hundred years ago, when, with his veterans, scorched by the African sun, he twice crushed the armies of the North in the neighborhood of Aix, and put off for three centuries the invasion of the Goths? The extermination of the Kymbri is the first necessity of empire, and in that same blood has imperialism always found fresh strength successively under Trajan, and Aurelian, and Theodosius.⁵⁷³
In 1812, Napoleon further remarked to Narbonne:

I am a true Roman Emperor; I am of the best race of Caesars—those who are founders. Chateaubriand, in I forget what number of the Mercure, has tacitly compared me to Tiberius. A good notion, indeed! Trajan, Diocletian, Aurelian, if you will; one of these men, born of themselves, and who overturned the world. You who know history so well, are you not struck by the similarities of my government with that of Diocletian—that tight-knit web of government that I am spreading over such distances, those all-seeing eyes of the Emperor, that civil authority which I have been obliged to keep all-powerful in the midst of an entirely military empire? As to Trajan, I fancy it is no flatterie d’opéra to compare me to him!\(^{574}\)

Here, while seeing himself in the light of several pagan emperors, Napoleon identified Diocletian in particular as a model for maintaining an intricate government and civil authority, while at the same time presiding over a military system. Thus, Napoleon once again equates a great man with simultaneous military and non-military attributes. A highlight in the above excerpt is the reference to “those all-seeing eyes of the Emperor,” i.e. Napoleon, like Diocletian, having an almost superhuman awareness.

Napoleon would soon move on from Caesarism to Caesaro-Papism (e.g. Constantine). Consider the path of political-religious aggrandizement that took Napoleon to 1812. Three Church feasts, Ascension Day, All Saints on 1 November,\(^{575}\) and Christmas, became state festivals,\(^{576}\) while the Church sanctified two state occasions, 14


\(^{575}\) Napoleon also decreed All Hallows Eve (more commonly known as Halloween) as an official celebration. See Napoleon Bonaparte, “Decree Regulating the Purpose of the Churches of Saint Denis and Saint Geneviève, February 20, 1806” in A Documentary Survey of Napoleonic France: A Supplement (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 1996), edited by Eric A. Arnold, 58.

\(^{576}\) With a title that reminds one of Roman emperors who gained public support by handing out free bread and providing mass entertainment spectacles, James Friguglietti and Jeff Horn’s article on electoral festivals in Napoleonic France covers the non-religious aspect of popular Napoleonic celebrations.
July and 2 December, the anniversary of the coronation and the victory of Austerlitz.\textsuperscript{577}

Perhaps the most poignant example of Napoleon’s efforts to aggrandize himself in the religious sense can be seen in how the Imperial Catechism proscribed the veneration of the Emperor’s name day. While the ancien régime attached the feast of St. Louis, the patron saint of every king from 1610 to 1792, to 15 August, the feast of the Assumption, Napoleon replaced the royal saint with St. Napoleon.\textsuperscript{578} The catechism went further still by asserting that Napoleon had been “raised up by God in difficult circumstances, that he was God’s anointed, and that good Christians must love him, pay taxes, accept conscription or go to hell.”\textsuperscript{579}

The pope’s attendance at Napoleon’s coronation and Napoleon’s summons of a national council of French and Italian bishops in Paris illustrate how Napoleon’s ultimate religious objectives went beyond the aspirations of Charlemagne to a revival of the Caesaro-Papism of Constantine I.\textsuperscript{580} Two years after that momentous event, Napoleon instructed his uncle to “Remind him [the pope] that Constantine distinguished the civilian sphere from the military, and that I too can nominate a senator to command in my name in Rome.”\textsuperscript{581}

Edgar Quinet (1803-1875) argued that Napoleon strove for the resurrection


\textsuperscript{578} Rémond, 81.

\textsuperscript{579} Ibid., 81.

\textsuperscript{579} For the text of the catechism, see Napoleon Bonaparte, “The Imperial Catechism of Napoleon I” in Readings in European History, Vol. II (New York: Ginn and Company, 1906), edited by J.H. Robinson, 509-510; for a scholarly interpretation of this text, see Wilson-Smith, 178.

\textsuperscript{580} Regrettably, Markham does not cite his sources in footnotes or endnotes, so I am unable to use the original source here. See Markham, 150.

\textsuperscript{581} Napoleon Bonaparte, Correspondance de Napoléon Ier, publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Volume XI (Paris: Plon and Dumaine, 1858-70), 9656; see also Napoleon Bonaparte,
of a type of imperial Roman monarchy and that Napoleon agreed to the Concordat with Pius VII as a necessary preparatory step in the fulfillment of this throwback to antiquity. Certainly, Napoleon directly showed his dominance of Catholic Italy by first decreasing the pope’s territory in 1797 with the Treaty of Tolentino and then by outright annexing Rome itself and making the Eternal City the capital of the French department of the Tiber in 1809. Napoleon clearly expressed such desires by stating, “I should have controlled the religious as well as the political world, and summoned church councils like Constantine.”

Louis-Napoléon Geoffroy-Château (1803-1858), a contemporary of the emperor and one of his adopted sons, who wrote a fascinating work on how Napoleon could have conquered Europe, speculated that Napoleon thought of declaring himself Pontiff of the Catholic Church. Such a step could have eventually led to his proclaiming himself the religious head of all of Christendom. Under his leadership, all the various sects of Christianity would have gathered. Still free and independent in their sects, they would have been united under the guidance of a single Pontiff. Yet he doubted the acceptance by all the people of such a move and thought that the time was not yet ripe.

While perhaps this vision was speculation, Napoleon did appreciate the idea of reigning as a sacred ruler and correspondingly encouraged painters to depict him as a Christ-like

---


582 Rémond, 101.

583 Markham, 150.

584 Caulaincourt’s grave argument for why Napoleon could not march on St. Petersburg after the burning of Moscow, as Napoleon unenthusiastically suggested, discredits Geoffroy-Château’s speculative account that begins with Napoleon marching successfully northward from Moscow in 1812, before capturing the tsar and the Russian capital. See de Caulaincourt, 134.

585 For more on the more suspect, though not entirely implausible, speculations on Napoleon and religion, see Geoffroy-Château, 134. This is the first English language edition of a volume considered to be the first novel-length example of counterfactual history, which was first printed in 1836, coinciding
figure, who granted mercy to rebels in Cairo, healed plague victims at Jaffa,\textsuperscript{586} and showed compassion to the soldiers butchered in the snow at Eylau.\textsuperscript{587} Thus, Antoine-Jean Gros explicitly and intentionally alludes to Christ, Joseph of Arimathea, St. Louis, St. Roche, and Trajan in \textit{Bonaparte visitant les pestiférés de Jaffa le 11 mars 1799},\textsuperscript{588} and after the battle of Eylau, a wounded Lithuanian referred to Napoleon as “César,”\textsuperscript{589} who served not only as Rome’s dictator, but also as pontifex maximus.

Figure 6. Antoine-Jean Gros’ portrait of \textit{Napoleon Visiting Plague Victims at Jaffa}.

In this painting, we see Napoleon take on an almost, as Timothy Wilson-Smith puts it, “‘Christ-like’” dimension.\textsuperscript{590} Art historian David O’Brien mentions how Napoleon’s poses in Gros’ paintings imitate prior artistic representations of Jesus Christ, with the completion of the \textit{Arc de Triomphe} and the first coup attempt of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte.\textsuperscript{586} See Fig. 3.\textsuperscript{587} David O’Brien, “Propaganda and the Republic of the Arts in Antoine-Jean Gros’ \textit{Napoléon Visiting the Battlefield of Eylau the Morning after the Battle}” in French Historical Studies 26.2 (2003), 281-314; Wilson-Smith, 180-181.\textsuperscript{588} Prendergast, 162-164.\textsuperscript{589} Ibid., 137.\textsuperscript{590} Alan Forrest, “The Military Culture of Napoleonic France” in \textit{Napoleon and Europe} (New
In point of fact, such imitations collectively demonstrate how Napoleon regarded the emperor as not only the successor of French sovereigns, but of other larger than life figures in Christian European history.

While these examples of neo-classical art help us understand how Napoleon wished for his subjects and succeeding generations to perceive the nature of his rule, Napoleon’s synthesis of earlier projects of European unification aids our understanding of the choice of members in his cult of great men. Napoleon further cited Caesar Augustus and Jesus as a precedent for the relationship between people and an emperor.

On 28 October 1806, while in Berlin, Napoleon issued the Twenty-first Bulletin of Grand Army, which reported:

His Majesty received all of the Protestant and Calvinist clergy. There are more than 10,000 or 12,000 French refugees at Berlin, whose predecessors took refuge there in consequence of the Edict of Nantes. His Majesty told them that they had just rights to his protection, and that their privileges and their cult would be maintained. His Majesty advised them to concern themselves with their own affairs, to remain peaceable, and pay obedience and respect to Caesar.

Notice the similarities between the above quoted passage from the Twenty-first Bulletin of 1806 and Napoleon’s proclamation “From Headquarters, Near-East, 14th Messidor in Year VI of the Republic,” in which he issued an order instructing his soldiers to emulate the Roman legions who “protected all religions” and to act with Muslims as “you did...

---

591 Marcus Aurelius, and Henry IV of France. In point of fact, such imitations collectively demonstrate how Napoleon regarded the emperor as not only the successor of French sovereigns, but of other larger than life figures in Christian European history.

592 On 28 October 1806, while in Berlin, Napoleon issued the Twenty-first Bulletin of Grand Army, which reported:

His Majesty received all of the Protestant and Calvinist clergy. There are more than 10,000 or 12,000 French refugees at Berlin, whose predecessors took refuge there in consequence of the Edict of Nantes. His Majesty told them that they had just rights to his protection, and that their privileges and their cult would be maintained. His Majesty advised them to concern themselves with their own affairs, to remain peaceable, and pay obedience and respect to Caesar.

593 Notice the similarities between the above quoted passage from the Twenty-first Bulletin of 1806 and Napoleon’s proclamation “From Headquarters, Near-East, 14th Messidor in Year VI of the Republic,” in which he issued an order instructing his soldiers to emulate the Roman legions who “protected all religions” and to act with Muslims as “you did...
with the Jews and with the Italians. Treat their Muftis and their Imams with respect, as you did the Rabbis and the Bishops.” He uses this same approach whether discussing Protestants or Muslims! A comparison of these two documents reveals a consistency in Napoleon’s method of merging religious, political, and military affairs, as well as indicating that his experiences in Egypt foreshadow his later attitudes and actions regarding religious and military matters. But the most important point to glean from both examples for the purposes of this study is that Napoleon, in a military document, presents his religious policies, while appealing to the example of the great leaders and great soldiers of the Roman Empire. Whether as a Republican General or an Emperor, Napoleon frequently included Romans in his cult of great men and for more than just military reasons.

The presentation of Napoleon in particular as a modern Caesar existed in art as well as text. Around the same time as the collapse of Prussia and during perhaps the height of Napoleon’s career, an Italian artist granted a pension by Napoleon named Andrea Appiani painted his *Apotheosis of Napoleon* in 1807. The painting depicts Napoleon in an exaggerated manner reminiscent of a deified Caesar. Two years later, when “The Institute propose[d] to give the Emperor the titles of *Augustus* and

---

594 J. David Markham, *Napoleon’s Road to Glory: Triumph, Defeats and Immortality*, 65-66. This quotation from Napoleon’s proclamation “From Headquarters, Near-East, 14th Messidor in Year VI of the Republic” also appears in the memoirs of Joseph-Marie Moiret, a French soldier who served in Napoleon’s Army of the Orient and also fantasized about following in the footsteps of “the Macedonian phalanxes . . . the Roman legions and the blessed battalions of the Crusaders.” Joseph-Marie Moiret, *Memoirs of Napoleon’s Egyptian Expedition, 1798-1801* (London: Greenhill Books, 2001), 40.

595 The connection of a Bonaparte with a Caesar in particular extended to his family. His sister Caroline was even referred to as “daughter of the Caesars.” De Salgues as quoted in Frank B. Goodrich, *At The Court of Napoleon* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1875), a work written in 1856 and reproduced in *The Napoleonic Society of America Member’s Bulletin* 82 (Summer/Fall 2006): 12.
Germanicus” on 3 October 1809, Napoleon responded, “If the Emperor desired any title, it would be that of Caesar.”

David Markham describes Napoleon’s improvements to Paris and other cities in France, Italy, and Switzerland as a parallel to the public works projects initiated by Julius

---

596 See Figure 1.
598 Ibid., 218.
Caesar. During Napoleon’s term as first consul of the French Republic, the consular regime utilized Roman themes in its physical representations of power, following, if not accentuating the vocabulary and iconography of the Directory. After 1802, the republican emblem on French currency changed to depict Napoleon’s profile in a guise reminiscent of a Roman ascetic. Following military victories that led to territorial and dynastic aggrandizement, from 1807 until the end of the First Empire, coins became more obviously imperial in style by depicting Napoleon’s head wreathed in laurels, symbolizing the return of glory under a new Caesar.

Figure 8. Scan I made of my 20 francs gold coin of 1809.

Ingres’ painting of Napoleon appropriating Roman symbolism corroborates printed primary sources that explicitly describe Napoleon as fulfilling such a role.

---

599 These improvements ranged from planting trees to founding a Parisian fire brigade. J. David Markham, “Infrastructure: Physical and Economic Unity” in *Napoleon’s Road to Glory: Triumph, Defeats & Immortality* (London: Brassey’s, 2003), 132-134.
Moreover, it is significant that Ingres shows Napoleon a Roman, rather than French.\textsuperscript{601} Furthermore, Napoleon’s sustained effort to have his image reproduced in such a fashion as in Ingres’ painting, but also on coins such as those of Augustus in the first century A.D., sends the message that Napoleon embodies his empire and that his empire actually revives, if not continues, the lineage of the most powerful empire in European history.\textsuperscript{602}

Figure 9. Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres’ portrait of Napoleon in his coronation robes.

Valérie Huet, while using predominately secondary sources, focuses on how early

\textsuperscript{600} Ellis 157-158.

\textsuperscript{601} Louis XIV was depicted in ancient costume as well. For more on imperial art under Napoleon, see Annie Jourdan, “Napoleon and his artists: in the grip of reality” in Taking liberties: Problems of a new order from the French Revolution to Napoleon (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), edited by Howard G. Brown and Judith A. Miller, 185-204; Timothy Wilson-Smith, Napoleon and his artists (London: Constable, 1996).

\textsuperscript{602} For more on this comparison of Napoleon as “a new Augustus,” see Valérie Huet, “Napoleon I: a new Augustus?” in Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789-1945 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), edited by Catherine Edwards, 53-69.
nineteenth century paintings, monuments, and sculptures depict Napoleon as a modern Augustus. Napoleon and his contemporaries also interpreted many non-artistic aspects of his reign as succeeding those of the Roman emperors, even though we know such comparisons exist. For example, one can rationally agree with the allusion made by Honoré de Balzac, the famous French novelist and contemporary of Napoleon, to the Praetorian Guard of the Roman emperors as a precursor to the Imperial Guard of Napoleon. Instead, Huet limits her argument to cover physical representations of Napoleon himself as a Roman emperor, although she occasionally makes fascinating references to how Napoleon’s use of Roman themes follows the examples of Renaissance and absolutist French monarchs like Francis I and Louis XIV, especially regarding paintings of French sovereigns as Roman gods and monumental Parisian columns imitating Trajan’s column in Rome. Therefore, when considering the major elements of The Imperial Napoleon’s cult of great men, Roman heroes whom Napoleon admired stand out as probably the most dominant membership of the cult during this phase of Napoleon’s career, especially individuals from the Roman Empire.

Of course, Napoleon did not reign over pagan Romans and so he also needed to remind his subjects of the great Christian emperors who preceded him. God had granted Constantine the Great victory at the Milvian Bridge in 312 and so during the 1805

---


604 As a result of his admiration for Napoleon, de Balzac bought a bust of the emperor around the time of Napoleon’s death in 1821. See Gérard Gengembre, Napoleon: The Immortal Emperor (New York: The Vendome Press, 2003), 116.

605 See Honoré de Balzac’s “Domestic Peace” for a wondrous description of the Napoleonic court.
campaign, pastoral letters were "read in every metropolitan church, justifying the war and encouraging new recruits to march . . . The bishops now . . . began the task once more and exhausted the Scriptures for texts to prove that the Emperor was protected by the God of armies." 606 He erected huge arches that aped the example of the Roman emperor Constantine’s arch in Rome even if Napoleon had French heroes placed upon his arches in Paris. As Paul Johnson explains, "The theme was Roman, indeed Caesarian-the bounds of Bonaparte’s empire had expanded from the Carolingian to projects that embraced all Europe and the Mediterranean." 607 During this period, Baron Dominique Vivant de Denon (1747-1825), the director of the Louvre Museum under Napoleon, reported to Napoleon on the value of looking to ancient motifs associated with Caesar, Trajan, and Marcus Aurelius for works of art. 608 Since Roman columns stand as an example of how Romans celebrated their imperial triumphs, not surprisingly, the Vendôme column (1806-1810) found its inspiration for Napoleon in Trajan’s Column in Rome. Napoleon also ordered statues erected in Paris, as well as Orléans, of such members of his cult of great people as Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Joan of Arc—a lone woman, Washington, and Frederick the Great. 609 In the process, Napoleon sought to join their ranks. As Napoleon said in 1809, “‘Men are great only by the monuments they

606 J. David Markham, Napoleon’s Road to Glory: Triumphs, Defeats and Immortality (London: Brassey’s, 2003), 164.
607 Johnson, 79.
608 Prendergast, 125.
leave behind’.”

Thus, as Johnson adds, huge “triumphal arches were set up, façades transformed.”

Napoleon’s grandiose building projects also included his Temple to the Glory of the Great Army or Church of the Madeleine (1807-1842), the Arc de Triomphe de l’Etoile (1806-1836), and the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel (1806-1810).

Figure 10. Photographs of the Arc de Triomphe de l’Etoile (left) and the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel (right) taken by Matthew Zarzeczny in Paris in May 2001.

After Napoleon restored the title of “king of Rome,” which had previously been used in the Holy Roman Empire for the imperial heir, for his son as the heir to the French imperial throne, Napoleon planned to build the Palace of the King of Rome in Paris as part of Napoleon’s aim to make Paris “not only the most beautiful city that has ever existed, but the most beautiful city that could exist.” Although Napoleon managed to


612 For more on various particular aspects of culture, religion, and society in Napoleonic Europe, see the proceedings of the Consortium on Revolutionary Europe.

613 See Fig. 8.

614 Ellis 167.
give Paris streets, arches and columns commemorating the army, temples celebrating religion and commerce, a redeveloped Louvre and Tuileries, and markets for the growing population, he only succeeded in digging foundations for the palace of the King of Rome. In 1811, Napoleon had commissioned the *Palais du Roi de Rome* to be built for the Imperial heir, but as with his plans for a palace in Rome, the military disasters that broke apart the Grand Empire after 1812 prevented the completion of the immense palace along the Seine. Napoleon intended such projects to immortalize himself and his successors as the most visible members of the cult of great men, whose other members would also be immortalized in their depictions on Roman-style arches and temples constructed throughout Paris.

While many note Napoleon’s efforts to beautify Paris, Napoleon certainly did not neglect the old imperial capital of Europe. In 1811, Napoleon’s regime drew up designs for a vast imperial palace to be built on Rome’s Capitoline Hill to be used as a second capital, where Napoleon’s successors would be crowned following their coronation in Paris. The plan further illustrates Napoleon’s increasing commitment to connecting his empire not solely with French heroes, but with a broader Roman heritage. The great Roman emperors had elaborate palaces in Rome. So would Napoleon.

Although Napoleon diminished Rome’s elevated status as capital of the Roman Empire to the less prestigious, but still honorary, rank as second city of the French Empire, he nevertheless imagined a significant role for the Eternal City in his concept of

---

615 Wilson-Smith 228.
616 Ibid. 211.
617 Felix Markham 146.
a peaceful European empire, albeit one with French laws and customs, just as others figured Rome into their various attempts to create a unified Europe, such as Otto III’s attempt to restore the Roman Empire with Rome as its capital in the tenth century. Unfortunately for Bonapartists, the supporters of Napoleon and his family, Napoleon’s defeat in Russia prevented the execution of these and other plans, such as the permanent reestablishment of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Principality of Lithuania, as well as the realization of a lasting general European religious settlement.

**Napoleon and the Cult of Jewish Heroes**

Although a “Christian” emperor, Napoleon nevertheless also wanted to protect Jews and people of other religious persuasions, because other great men did so earlier in history. The Republican Napoleon did have some earlier experiences appealing to great men when describing religious policies, but he could only do so in the capacity of a general in control of occupied territory. Moreover, his major religious work as First Consul focused on negotiating the Concordat, i.e. an event that focused on Christian figures. As emperor of an ever expanding Grand Empire, however, Napoleon took a more active interest in gaining the support of his Jewish subjects and as with many of his policies, he did so by appealing to the memory of great men of antiquity and by propping up “great” contemporaries as well.

Napoleon seized upon virtually anything he could to gain support for his goals.

---

610 Rowe, 155.
and so he certainly did not neglect any hopes for religious unity or at least religious support. Studying the role of religion during the First Empire in France under Napoleon sheds light on those less-often referenced, but more civil achievements connected to his cult of great men. With changing numbers of and different types of religious minorities figuring into the empire, in addition to the Catholic Church having dissimilar numbers of adherents within these changing borders, Bonaparte had to articulate and formulate certain vital religious policies. In regard to the conditions of religious minorities, Napoleon worked to dominate authoritatively clerics of all faiths, while integrating Jewish and Protestant religious life into his authoritarian social structure. For his efforts, along with the many great historic leaders that Napoleon hoped to imitate, some Jews actually praised Napoleon as “the Solomon of our century.”

Napoleon, who “fancied himself to be another Solomon who would rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem or a new Herod wielding authority over the dispersed nation, … considered the Jewish people as a partner in his world-wide plans.” He explained later:

[As] I had restored them [Jews] to all their privileges, and made them equal to my other subjects, they must consider me like Solomon or Herod, to be the head of their nation, and my subjects as brethren of a tribe similar to theirs. . . . I wanted

---

619 Further indicating Napoleon’s open-mindedness to any available avenues for gaining European cooperation, Caulaincourt reveals that in October 1812, Napoleon had a proclamation prepared to emancipate the serfs in Russia, but was opposed in this matter by his advisors. See de Caulaincourt, 162-167.

620 Ellis, 216.


622 Kobler, 213.
to establish a universal liberty of conscience and thought to make all men equal, whether Protestants, Catholics, Mohammedans, Deists, or others.  

Use of variations of the term “universal” or “universality” appear multiple times in his remarks on how his religious policies aped those of earlier great men. Franz Kobler explains how Napoleon, using a phrase from Gregoire’s prize-winning essay,

visualized himself … as a counterpart of Solomon’s successor of non-Jewish origin — the Idumean Herod the Great. Thus, the dramatic reference to the famous kings of Israel proves that he dreamed of indeed becoming, if not, as many suspected, a ‘Messiah’ of the Jews, then at least a Messianic ruler of the dispersed Jewish nation who would unite *l’universalité des Israélites* and bring about their moral regeneration.  

For their part, Napoleon’s Jewish subjects repeated the comparison of Napoleon with great Jewish leaders of antiquity.

Even before this particular gesture, Napoleon had earlier demonstrated his benevolent attitude toward minority religions when he attempted to resurrect a Jewish Middle Eastern state during the invasion of Syria in 1799.  

The memory of that revolutionary project, followed by Napoleon’s legal recognition of Judaism as a religious community in 1805 and his establishment of the Grand Sanhedrin of European rabbis in 1807, caused French Jewry to publicly declare their civic support of him.

In 1806, Napoleon’s Jewish subjects offered infinite “thanks … to the Hero of

---

623 Ibid., 174-175.
624 Ibid., 176-177.
France, the Solomon of our days!”  They wrote about “the Grand Napoleon” extending
towards us his powerful, protecting hand . . .”  They celebrated his birthday by asserting that “these lights of heaven do not mark a brighter day than this; for on this day, NAPOLEON, the greatest of kings, was given unto us.”  The reader should notice here that Napoleon is incorrectly referred to as a great “king,” rather than “emperor.” The designation may not necessarily be an error, because if Jews are comparing Napoleon to Solomon and Herod, both kings, then it may seem more logical to refer to Napoleon as the greatest of the three figures by calling him also a king and technically Napoleon was also king of Italy at the time.

To the Jews of the Grand Empire, their notion of a great king involved kingship of many talents. Not only was political and religious leadership important, but also art, economics, and science. Thus, the French and Italian Israelites indicated that Napoleon followed Solomon in the following manner:

Nevertheless, Solomon, third King of Israel, by his wisdom succeeded in procuring peace from his external enemies, and in inspiring his subjects with the love of sciences, arts, and commerce.

The description of the temple, raised by that great king to the true God, and the details of the magnificent decorations which adorned it, are so many proofs that Solomon had already carried commerce, arts, and sciences to a very high pitch . . .

In any event, the presentation of Napoleon as not just a great man but a veritable

---

628 Ibid., 15.
629 Ibid., 51.
630 Ibid., 90.
Messiah continued with his calling of the Sanhedrin in 1807. Kobler describes how the word that Napoleon aspired to become the ‘Messiah of the Jews’ — so often and openly heard in the year 1799 — reappeared on the lips of many. An anonymous pamphlet entitled ‘Qu’est-ce qu’un Israélite chrétien?’ maintained, on the ground of a passage from Isaiah, that Napoleon was ‘the Lord’s Anointed who will save Israel.’

Napoleon cultivated Jewish support, particularly in Alsace and the Rhineland, by calling assemblies of notable Jews to reconcile Jewish legal traditions with the Napoleonic Code and especially to resolve “the problem of usury.” Napoleon, who would later express his desire for a “Europe . . . divided into nationalities *freely* [my italics] formed and free internally” and “a council of the Western Church” that would include “the bishops of Italy [my italics] and of Germany [my italics],” used remarkably similar words when he called for “a general assembly of Jews legally and *freely* [my italics] convened and including Spanish and Portuguese, Italian, German [my italics] and French Jews.”

This assembly began its existence as the Assembly of the Israelites of France and of the Kingdom of Italy, but later simply became the Assembly of Notables. In a manner

---

631 Napoleon may have had less generous intentions with calling the Sanhedrin than this hyperbolic praise would suggest. Simeon J. Maslin addresses how “Napoleon intended to use the Sanhedrin as an instrument of espionage and as a means of creating a mass of individuals loyal to him in the countries east of France . . .” Simeon J. Maslin, *An Analysis and Translation of Selected Documents of Napoleonic Jewry* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1957), 14.

632 Kobler, 163.


636 Schwarzfuchs, 53.
somewhat reminiscent of traditional rabbinical responsa, Napoleon’s government asked
twelve questions of the Assembly of Notables established in 1806,\textsuperscript{637} the same year that
Napoleon issued an executive order that commissioned a painting of “His Majesty
visiting the Fountains of Moses” for six thousand francs.\textsuperscript{638} The Notables in turn offered
opinions on such significant matters as whether or not Christians and Jews could
intermarry and whether or not French Jews considered themselves French.\textsuperscript{639} Then, in a
process that went on into 1807, Napoleon transformed “the Assembly of Notables into a
Great Sanhedrin, which would review the answers of the deputies, and convert them into
a second body of legislation for the Jews, following the laws of Moses” — all in the
hopes of creating a Jewish Code in the tradition of the Code Napoléon.\textsuperscript{640}

Napoleon’s Jewish Assemblies of 1806 thus presented “him with an opportunity
to cast himself in the role of lawgiver and lend legitimacy to his rule.”\textsuperscript{641} Napoleon’s
transformation of “the Assembly of Notables into a Great Sanhedrin” under the
presidency of David Sinzheim, the grand rabbi of Strasbourg since 1795, meant the
resurrection of a Jewish institution that ended under the Roman Empire.\textsuperscript{642} In 1806,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{637} Heinrich “Graetz termed the assembly of the Jewish Notables ‘the first Jewish Parliament’ . . .”
Kobler, 109.
\textsuperscript{638} Napoleon Bonaparte, “Executive Order,” Napoleon: Symbol for an Age, A Brief History with
\textsuperscript{639} Schwarzfuchs, 56-57.
\textsuperscript{640} Kobler, 156; Schwarzfuchs, 80.
\textsuperscript{641} For the source of the quoted text, see Jill Maciak Walshaw, “Review of Taking Liberties:
Problems of a New Order from the French Revolution to Napoleon” in H-France Review (2005): 5.60,
http://www.h-france.net/vol5reviews/walshaw.html. For the article and book by Schechter, see Ronald B.
order from the French Revolution to Napoleon, ed. Howard G. Brown and Judith A. Miller (Manchester:
Manchester University Press, 2002), 147-165; Ronald Schechter, Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of
\textsuperscript{642} Boudon, 194; Schwarzfuchs, 80.
\end{flushright}
Napoleon wrote to the Jewish assembly, “Not since the capture of Jerusalem by Titus have so many enlightened men belonging to the religion of Moses been able to assemble in one place.”\textsuperscript{643} Just as the constitutional bishop of Versailles, Louis Charrier de La Roche, had compared Napoleon to Cyrus the Great and Protestant pastors similarly referred to Napoleon as a new Cyrus in the capacity of a “restorer of the religion,”\textsuperscript{644} the participants of the Sanhedrin also sang a canticle that made reference to a prophecy of the Biblical Isaiah and compared Napoleon to the Persian Great King who ended the Babylonian Captivity of Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{645} As Franz Kobler puts it, Napoleon “exchanged the role of Alexander the Great for that of Cyrus . . .”\textsuperscript{646}

Napoleon’s summoning of “the rabbis, the land owners, and other Jews who are distinguished by their integrity and their intelligence” from all parts of the Grand Empire in imitation of ancient practices further indicates how Napoleon’s understanding of the use of religion for practical and beneficial purposes, as with his appropriation of Persian and Roman political ideas, had historic and in this case ancient origins.\textsuperscript{647} By drawing on the memory of great rulers from antiquity, Napoleon used the cult of great men to gain

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Napoleon Bonaparte, \textit{Correspondance de Napoléon Ier, publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III}, Volume XIII (Paris: Plon and Dumaine, 1858-70), 100-103; see also Bonaparte, “Note to the minister of the interior, August 23, 1806, on the assembly of the Jews,” \textit{The Mind of Napoleon}, 112.}
\footnote{The original quotation has the phrase “restauration de la religion.” See Boudon, 137.}
\footnote{At least one Jew acclaimed: “‘And what else can we say when we consider his [Napoleon’s] wonderful works, his first campaigns in Italy, his achievements in Asia and in Africa, his second campaigns in Italy, and, lastly, his astonishing campaigns in Germany, and that ever memorable victory of Austerlitz, which produced the glorious peace of Presburg? After these wonders, could we one moment hesitate to apply to our invincible Emperor these words of Isaiah: ‘Thus said the Lord to his anointed Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him . . .’” Kobler, 158; ed. Ellis Rivkin, \textit{Transactions of the Parisian Sanhedrin or Acts of the Assembly of Israelitish Deputies of France and Italy Convoked at Paris by an Imperial and Royal Decree Dated May 30, 1806} (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1956), 24, 44.}
\footnote{Ibid., 108.}
\footnote{Maslin, 3.}
\end{footnotes}
the support of his Jewish subjects and to appeal to Jews even outside of France and Italy’s borders.

**Napoleon and the Cult of English Heroes, Part II**

As we have seen, Napoleon’s heroes and models as rulers came from many moments in history and reigned over peoples of diverse religions and ethnicities, including over peoples not entirely under Napoleon’s control. Thus, it should not be all that surprising by now that Napoleon acknowledged the qualities of great men from nations he considered his adversaries. *English History in Napoleon’s Notebooks* reveals that even before the French Revolution began, Napoleon studied and wrote extensively on various figures from English history, some of whom became members of the Napoleonic cult of great men. Although neither the Republican nor the Imperial Napoleon actually ruled England, he did nevertheless contemplate the prospect at a few key moments in his reign when such an achievement seemed within the realm of possibility. At such moments, he once again spoke and wrote of great Englishmen.

In 1809, Napoleon reflected on the disasters during the Egyptian campaign by once again citing the achievements of a great English king, Richard the Lionhearted. Napoleon remarked that Richard

had been more fortunate than we were at Acre, but not braver than you, my good Lannes. He had defeated the great Saladin. And in spite of that hardly had he returned to the shores of Europe than he fell into the hands of people who were
certainly not his equals.\footnote{Napoleon Bonaparte, \textit{Napoleon’s Notes on English History made on the Eve of the French Revolution, illustrated from Contemporary Historians and referenced from the findings of Later Research by Henry Foljambe Hall}. New Yorl: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1905, 10.}

Of course, Richard the Lionhearted was as French as he was English. Thus, we see that Napoleon did admire some of the heroes of his greatest enemies. During the War of the Fourth Coalition, he even hoped to use British technology against the English by offering “a reward to any French inventor who could reproduce Congreve’s” rockets.\footnote{Richard Tennant, “Congreve’s Rockets,” \textit{First Empire: The International Magazine for the Napoleonic Enthusiast, Historian and Gamer} 93 (March/April 2007): 24.} We should also remember that as far back as 1788, Napoleon thought of the British people as being descended from “Gallic colonists.”\footnote{Napoleon Bonaparte, \textit{Napoleon’s Notes on English History made on the Eve of the French Revolution, illustrated from Contemporary Historians and referenced from the findings of Later Research by Henry Foljambe Hall}. New Yorl: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1905, 19.} Napoleon also explained how he hoped to enter London as “a liberator, a second William III, but more disinterested and generous than he.”\footnote{For the source of this quotation, see Brendan Simms, “Britain and Napoleon” in \textit{Napoleon and Europe} (New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), edited by Philip G. Dwyer, 190. For a somewhat related explanation by Napoleon about “how he would reform the English army,” which would include the abolition of the lashing of soldiers—something that Napoleon referred to as “degrading,” see Barry E. O’Meara, \textit{Napoleon in Exile; or, A Voice from St. Helena, Vol. 1} (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1822), 129-30; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, “Conversation, November 9, 1816,” \textit{The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words}, ed. J. Christopher Herold (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 179.} Furthermore, this last quotation once again demonstrates how Napoleon, as with many unrealized aspects of his dreams, saw himself as the successor of a diverse range of past great men and eras in European history.

While “Emperor” of Elba in 1814, Napoleon praised other great Englishmen who were not kings. Viscount Ebrington reports that Napoleon “praised, in the highest terms, the late Lord Cornwallis, as a man who, without superior talents, was, from his integrity and goodness, an honour to his country. ‘He was what I call, one of the superior class of...
your English nobility;” and he wished that he had some of his stamp in France.”652

Napoleon revered Mr. Fox, who “was everywhere received as a god, because the people knew he was always a friend to peace….I believe, if Mr. Fox had lived, we should have made peace.”653 In the same conversation, Napoleon asked if Fox’s oratory was not more in the manner of Demosthenes and Mr. Pitt’s in that of Cicero. Thus, Napoleon held accomplished English monarchs and statesmen in such a high regard that they merited mentioning in the same breath as the greatest orators of Greco-Roman antiquity.

**Napoleon and the Cult of Great Women?**

An earlier chapter covering Napoleon and the Cult of English Heroes omits a remark from 1788 about Alfred the Great’s daughter, who “governed with the greatest intrepidity” and “was the model of her brother.”654 The chapter on the Republican Napoleon similarly excludes how he regarded his first wife with an intense romantic hyperbole, that while beautiful is exceptional in his thoughts on women: “You to whom nature has given spirit, sweetness, and beauty, you who alone can move and rule my

---


654 Napoleon Bonaparte, *Napoleon’s Notes on English History made on the Eve of the French*
heart, you who knows all too well the absolute empire you exercise over it!" Omitting these statements then was necessary as the emphasis by Napoleon throughout his youth and onto his republican phase was overwhelmingly on great men.

Yet, this chapter has occasionally alluded to some instances in which the Imperial Napoleon did recognize great women whether it is with the erection of a statue of Joan of Arc or with the naming of ships after notable ancient and contemporary women. While the emphasis or focus on men certainly remained during the imperial phase, a few women actually did receive similar praise and recognition from Napoleon as he gave to his male heroes that is worth addressing. Consider, for example, the following reference to Empress Maria Theresa in a bulletin of the Grand Army:

The palace of Schönbrunn, in which the Emperor resides, was built by Maria Theresa, whose portrait is to be found in almost every apartment. In the office where the Emperor is working there is a marble statue of this sovereign. The Emperor, on seeing it, remarked that if that great queen were still living she would not allow herself to be influenced by the intrigues of a woman such as Madame Colloredo. Constantly surrounded as she always was with the chief persons of her kingdom, she would have known the inclination of her people; she would not have had her provinces ravaged by the Cossacks and Muscovites; she would not have consulted, in order to make up her mind to make war on France, a courtesan like Cobentzl, who, too well informed respecting court intrigues, dreads to disobey a foreign woman invested with a pernicious authority, which she abuses; a scribe like Collembach; and finally a man so universally detested as Lambertie.

When, in 1809, Napoleon spoke of “the great Maria Theresa,” of course this utterance

---


occurred not long before he would marry a Marie-Louise. Napoleon also offered that Maria Theresa’s Russian contemporary

Catherine the Great knew well the genius and resources of Russia when, in the first coalition, she did not send an army and contented herself with helping the members of the coalition by her counsels and by her wishes. . . . she had the experience of a long reign and of the character of her nation. She had reflected on the dangers of coalitions.  

He also said of Catherine II that she “was a master woman worthy to grow a beard upon her chin,” a statement that suggests her greatness was masculine, not feminine. Yet, Napoleon did identify feminine qualities as well in great women. While at Tilsit in July 1807, Napoleon wrote to Josephine that “The Queen of Prussia is really charming and full of coquettishness toward me.” Napoleon told Josephine that the Queen of Prussia, who spoke with Napoleon of Porus and Alexander, “reminded me of the great deeds of Maria Theresa, which rendered to her the admiration of Germany—of that illustrious woman who braved all the efforts of combined Europe in defense of her heritage.” Finally, he noted that his first wife’s daughter “Hortense (Queen of Holland) forces me to believe in feminine virtue.”

Indicating that Napoleon used women for symbolic nationalist purposes in a

---

662 See the entry for October 17 in Napoleon Bonaparte, The Napoleon Calendar: A Quotation from the Works and Sayings of Napoleon for every Day in the Year compiled by Dr. A. S. Rappoport.
manner similar to his male heroes, Napoleon “sanctioned the revival of the festival of Joan of Arc at Orléans”\(^6\) and responded to a request to erect a statue of Joan of Arc in Orléans by stating,

Please write to citizen Crignon-Désormeaux, mayor of Orleans, to say that I approve of the resolution. The illustrious career of Joan of Arc proves that there is no miracle French genius cannot perform in face of a threat against national freedom. The French nation has never known defeat. But our frank and loyal nature has been taken advantage of by clever and calculating neighbors. Time after time they have sown dissension among us. Hence the calamities of past history, and of our own generation.\(^6\)

Thus, we see that Napoleon’s habit of using past heroic figures for symbolic purposes did not exclude women, although their appearance in the cult of great men was indeed limited.

Yet, on this particular occasion, he actually did promote the recognition of the career of an individual whose religious fame nearly equaled her nationalist role for the French. As a result of Joan of Arc’s dual significance, she could simultaneously serve as a rallying point for the French in general and as an example of piety for Napoleon’s non-male subjects. In the latter sense, the religious aspect of this semi-legendary girl’s life reflects Napoleon’s statement from 15 May 1807, while residing at the château of Finkenstein in what is now modern Poland: “religion is an all-important matter in a public school for girls. Whatever people may say, it is the mother’s surest safeguard, and the husband’s. What we ask of education is not that girls should think, but that they

---


should believe.” Napoleon used the simultaneously religious and national heroine Joan of Arc as a means of inspiration for women, just as he used male heroes to inspire men. Indeed, by providing visible reminders of great people from the past, Napoleon worked hard to earn the support of his subjects, male and female, great and common, soldier and civilian, alike.

Yet, it is also worth repeating that Napoleon’s cult of great people changed and developed depending on the phase or moment of his life. The Republican Napoleon just after conquering Italy reportedly rather flippantly told Madame de Staël, “The greatest woman in the world is she who has borne the greatest number of children.” She subsequently spent much of the time of the First Empire outside of France. Yet, later Napoleon expressed a sort of admiration for de Staël: “She was at once Armida and Clorinda. After all, it cannot be denied that Madame de Staël is a very distinguished woman, endowed with great talents, and possessing a very considerable share of wit. She will go down to posterity.” Once again, we see Napoleon look to the past for comparisons with great contemporaries. Armida (a witch) and Clorinda (a warrior-maiden) are characters in Torquato Tasso’s Jerusalem Delivered (1581) about the First Crusade. Thus, for Napoleon, Madame de Staël, like Joan of Arc, Maria Theresa, and Catherine the Great, had a complex, multifaceted character and personality analogous to the many great men admired by Napoleon.

---

666 Napoleon, February 2.
667 John E.C. Abbot, “Napoleon Bonaparte,” Harper’s New Monthly Magazine VI (December,
Napoleon and the Cult of Great Cultural Heroes

The Imperial Napoleon also deviated from the Republican Napoleon by focusing much more on fellow rulers as great men than on artists and intellectuals. Even most of the great women mentioned above held some kind of leadership positions. Nevertheless, he did still comment on occasion on great artists and intellectuals as well, many of whom were not in fact “French.” We have already seen how Napoleon’s artists and sculptors focused on immortalizing Napoleon in the manner of not just French kings but also Roman emperors and how they drew accordingly upon themes from antiquity for their work. This habit extended to the realm of drama. In a letter to the minister of the interior in 1807, Napoleon identified the Greeks as “still our models,” explaining that we “have surpassed the Greeks neither in tragedy nor in comedy nor in epic poetry…”

When it came to drama, Napoleon’s interests focused on plays by the Greeks and Romans or early modern French adaptations of ancient subjects. In conversations and letters from 1805 and 1806, Napoleon devoted paragraphs to Atreus, Phaedra, and Oedeipus. On 25 October 1805, Napoleon wrote to Fouché on how a ballet titled

---

1852, to May, 1853): 463.
Ulysses’ Return “is a splendid subject…I gave Gardel the idea.”

In December 1805, Napoleon wrote to Champagny that François Just Marie Raynouard, author of Les Templiers, “can turn out something good if he really gets to the heart of classical tragedy: the Atrides were the victims of fate and heroes were guilty without being criminal—they merely took part in the crimes of their gods. This is not a suitable method for modern history which is concerned with the nature of things. If a tragedy is not based on this principle it will not be in the tradition of our great masters.”

The emperor conversed with Talma regarding the actor’s portrayal of Nero in Racine’s Britannicus and Julius Caesar in Corneille’s La Mort de Pompée. Regarding the former, Napoleon advised, “Your acting should convey more clearly the struggle between an evil disposition and a good education. I also should like you to gesticulate less. Men of Nero’s character are not expansive: rather they are concentrated.”

Regarding the latter, Napoleon remarked that heads “of empires are not so lavish with gestures” and that “Caesar isn’t saying what he thinks. Don’t make Caesar talk like Brutus. When Brutus says he abhors kings, he should be believed—but Caesar, no. Note the difference.”

With regards to the musical stage, in 1805 in two separate letters to two different people, Napoleon described the German Mozart’s opera Don Juan, i.e. Don Giovanni as “very
good music.”675 Thus, Napoleon’s interest in great men continued to extend to the
dramatic and musical world even if the overall focus during the imperial phase was on
great leaders.

Napoleon’s cultural heroes continued to include not only dramatists and
composers, but also scientists and novelists. Napoleon honored the astronomer and
mathematician Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749-1827) by making him Minister of the Interior
under the Consulate and subsequently Chancellor of the Senate, Count of the Empire,
Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour, and Senator under the Empire.676 The Imperial
Napoleon similarly continued to appreciate the written word of international great men.
When Napoleon met Goethe in 1808, the emperor’s first words were simply, “Here’s a
man!”677 Yet Napoleon did not praise all European cultural heroes of the Enlightenment
and Revolutionary eras. In 1804, Napoleon declared “that Kant was obscure and that he
did not like him.”678 Nor did Napoleon see value in certain other kinds of intellectuals
from this age. In a conversation in Savoy on 30 December 1807 with Auguste de Staël,
Napoleon railed against economists as “empty dreamers who think up financial systems
and are not fit to be tax collectors in the least village of my empire.” Napoleon described
Jacques Necker as “an ideologist, a madman, a senile maniac” who deserved blame for

---

675 “To Joseph,” Correspondance de Napoléon Ier publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III,
Tome XI (Paris: Plon and Dumaine, 1858-70), 285; “To Champagny,” Correspondance de Napoléon Ier
676 Oscar Browning, The Boyhood and Youth of Napoleon: Some Chapters on the Life of Bonaparte, 1769-
1793 (Lond: John Lane, 1906), 82.
677 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Unterredung mit Napoleon,” in Vol. XXXVII of Sämalice
Werke (Berlin: Propyläen-Verlag, n.d.), 86.
678 Constant, Mémoires sur la vie privée de Napoléon, sa famille et sa cour, Vol. I (Paris: Garnier,
n.d.), 325.
overthrowing the monarchy and leading “Louis XVI to the scaffold.” As Napoleon claimed further, “even Robespierre, Marat, Danton have done less harm to France than Monsieur Necker. It’s he who made the Revolution….It was your grandfather who was the cause of the Saturnalia that devastated France.” In this conversation, Napoleon seems to regard the Revolution as a catastrophe and not just the economists, but even the republican heroes of the Revolution are seen as harmful rather than great for destroying the monarchy, which is after all consistent with the viewpoint of an emperor. Finally, Napoleon once again returns to a classical comparison as if the revolutionaries brought about a Saturnalia, a Roman festival in which social roles (such as between slaves and masters) reversed.

**Napoleon and the Cult of Military Heroes**

This chapter began with Napoleon just before he became Emperor of the French conversing over the greatness of Alexander the Great, Caesar, Charlemagne, Louis XIV, and Frederick the Great. Throughout his reign, Napoleon would refer to each of these men, but usually by themselves. Yet, the grouping appears again in slightly modified form at the end of the Empire. When discussing the collapse of the French Empire in 1814, Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne recounts, but does not specify a date, when Napoleon said at Malmaison:

---

Who knows the names of those kings who have passed from the thrones on which chance or birth seated them? They lived and died unnoticed. The learned, perhaps, may find them mentioned in old archives, and a medal or coin dug from the earth may reveal to antiquarians the existence of a sovereign of whom they have never before heard. But, on the contrary, when we hear the names of Cyrus, Alexander, Caesar, Mahomet, Charlemagne, Henry IV, and Louis XIV, we are immediately among our intimate acquaintance.680

Throughout Napoleon’s Imperial Phase from 1804 through 1815, he and his close associates continued to elaborate on their dreams of enacting grandiose political and religious policies in the manner of a diverse and ever-changing pantheon of ancient, medieval, and early modern leaders from Western Civilization and beyond.

During Napoleon’s transition from a republican to imperialist there was a distinct imbalance in how he viewed great women and great men. Only rarely did Napoleon comment reverently on notable historical women, such as Joan of Arc and Catherine the Great. In this he shared the prejudice of his era. Indeed, the first female knight received her Legion of Honor only under the Second Empire of Napoleon III and Madame Maria Sklodowska-Curie became the first woman buried in the Panthéon only in 1995. As Napoleon asserted, “For one woman who inspires us to do something good, there are a hundred who lead us into folly.”681 Hence we see that, aside from the rare references to Joan of Arc, Maria Theresa, and Catherine the Great, Napoleon more typically looked to the examples of great men, not great women.

During the imperial phase of his career, Napoleon did much to recognize and
promote his male supporters’ accomplishments regardless of occupation or nationality.

As indicated throughout this chapter, Napoleon appealed to the memory of not just great military leaders, but also political and religious leaders. He did notably exclude popes from his cult of great men, as in 1811, when Napoleon regarded the time of Gregory VII as disastrous with the pope’s intentions described as “subversive.” Yet, Napoleon did award and reward cardinals and bishops with interment in the Panthéon or granting of the Legion of Honor as he did great soldiers and politicians. As he explained, “I am not only the Emperor of soldiers; I am also Emperor of the peasants [and] the plebeians of France.”

By establishing elements of a meritocracy with a civilian Legion of Honor and declaring that every French soldier had a marshal’s baton in his knapsack, Napoleon held out the possibility that Frenchmen, regardless of initial status, whether they be soldiers, peasants, or plebeians, had the potential to distinguish himself through fighting or education and potentially join the ranks of the cult of great men.

While the argument of this dissertation is that Napoleon did not simply remilitarize the cult of great men, that does not mean that military heroes were not a major part of the cult. After all, in 1809, Napoleon wrote that he considered deceased Marshal Jean Lannes “my best friend.” By 1813, Cartellier sculpted a statue of

---


Marshal Lannes the Duc de Montebello for the Cour d’Honneur at the Invalides.\textsuperscript{685}

Napoleon praised his soldiers and rewarded them in many similar ways as great civilians. He “insisted that his marshals and prefects imitate his example by wearing specially designed imperial uniforms of elaborate gold brocade,”\textsuperscript{686} created imperial duchies to reward his marshals, and selected senators from “among the most distinguished citizens.”\textsuperscript{687} Shortly after becoming emperor, Napoleon told the representative of Nice that many of “our mutual acquaintances in the Army of Nice…are now great men.”\textsuperscript{688}

Napoleon would decorate his troops while in camp, calling them “brave” men as he did so, naming “the bravest officer of the regiment” a baron and naming “the regiment’s bravest soldier…a knight of the Legion of Honor.”\textsuperscript{689} Other soldiers could earn such nicknames as “L’Enforceur, ‘the smasher’.”\textsuperscript{690}

Napoleon also expounded upon the promotion of his best soldiers (men) as practically reincarnations of great warriors of old. Accordingly, he called his grenadiers The Immortals,\textsuperscript{691} an originally Persian distinction. Not since the Byzantines revived this title for their elite forces in the eleventh century

\textsuperscript{685} Guerrini, 296.
\textsuperscript{686} Philip F. Riley, “Review of Dressed to Rule: Royal and Court Costume from Louis XIV to Elizabeth II,” The Historian 69.3 (Fall, 2007): 587.
\textsuperscript{687} Napoleon Bonaparte, “Speech to the Senate on the Creation of Imperial Duchies, 1807,” Napoleon: Symbol for an Age, A Brief History with Documents, ed. Rafe Blaufarb (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008), 114-115.
\textsuperscript{689} François-René Cailloux (Pouget), “Napoleon Decorating His Troops, 1895,” Napoleon: Symbol for an Age, A Brief History with Documents, ed. Rafe Blaufarb (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008), 121-122.
*Anno Domini* and not again until under the last Shah of Iran would an empire’s greatest soldiers receive such an almost mythical designation. As early as 1805, Napoleon wrote of “immortal glory” and proclaimed that any individual French soldier who survived Austerlitz would be called “a brave man.”

Napoleon’s fascination with great warriors from Antiquity extended beyond the Greco-Persian world to the era of Roman dominance.

On 30 December 1805, with “talk of organizing *a triumphal* entry into the French capital that would have echoed those of ancient Rome,” the Tribunate—part of the imperial French legislature reminiscent of the Roman tribunes of old—“unanimously voted to give the emperor the title *‘Napoleon the Great’*.” This implied a connection between Napoleon and militarily successful Roman emperors when addressing his troops. When describing the Danube River to his soldiers in a bulletin of the Grand Army, he explained:

> In Hungary it diminishes a great deal; and at the place where Trajan raised a bridge, it is almost unnoticeable. There, the Danube is 450 toises broad; here it is only 400. The bridge of Trajan was a stone bridge, the work of several years. Caesar’s bridge over the Rhine was raised, it is true, in eight days, but no loaded carriage could pass over it.

Thus, if his soldiers were the great warriors, modern Immortals, then he was their great commander, a modern Trajan or Caesar. Nevertheless, Napoleon is inconsistent in his praises of semi-legendary soldiers of old. Yes, above, we see Napoleon seizing upon the

---

693 Ibid., 36.
aura of the Immortals, but on another occasion he issued an Order of the Day that asserted, “Soldiers, you have justified my expectations. You have supplemented your numbers by your bravery. You have gloriously marked the difference that exists between the soldiers of Caesar and the armed mobs of Xerxes.”

Here we see Napoleon’s consistent admiration for Caesar and his legions, but in both passages quoted above we detect a shift from admiration to derision of the Persian Great Kings and their Immortals. Thus, on one hand Napoleon “exchanged the role of Alexander the Great for that of Cyrus” by calling for the Sanhedrin, earlier riding a horse at Austerlitz named Cyrus, and in the same year as Austerlitz writing to the shah of Persia praising a more modern Persian: “Nadir Shah was a great warrior. He knew how to acquire supreme power. He made himself feared by the seditious and respected by his neighbors. He triumphed over his enemies and ruled gloriously.” On the other hand, Napoleon added, Nadir Shah “lacked the kind of wisdom which looks at once to the present and the future,” and in 1809, Napoleon published a bulletin of the Grand Army that records how

The Prince of Ligne said aloud, “I thought I was old enough not to have outlived the Austrian monarch.” And when the old Count Wallis saw the Emperor set out to join the army, he said, “There is Darius running to meet an Alexander: he will experience the same fate.”

Thus, Napoleon recognized great Persians for both their strengths and weaknesses; an

---

696 Kobler, 108.
698 Napoleon Bonaparte, “Eighth Bulletin” in Imperial Glory: The Bulletins of Napoleon’s Grande
objectivity toward many of his heroes that Napoleon offered occasionally throughout his life.

**Preliminary Conclusions**

In the final years of the Grand Empire, Napoleon continued to project himself as Alexander the Great when inspiring his dwindling Grand Army. David Markham explains that in 1812, “some thought Napoleon would not stop with Russia. These people believed that after Napoleon defeated Russia and once again secured Alexander’s friendship, he would follow in the footsteps of Alexander the Great and march all the way to India.” Even in Moscow in 1812, his aide-de-camps remarked, “We are leaving Moscow, not to retreat to the rear, but to go to the Indies!” In May 1813, the *Moniteur* reported that the “dark plots hatched by the Cabinet of St James during a whole winter are in an instant undone, like the Gordian knot by the sword of Alexander.” On 14 March 1814, Napoleon wrote to Savary: “None of these people know that, like Alexander, I am cutting the Gordian knot….Let it not be forgotten that it is I who am the great tribune.” Of course Alexander achieved his legendary feat near the start of his career. Napoleon was at his career’s end.

The positive connection of Napoleon and his army with the semi-legendary

---


699 J. David Markham, *Napoleon for Dummies*, 189.

700 Blond, 339.


702 As quoted in Guerrini, 327-328.
flying forces of the ancient world appears once more before his final defeat when the Hundred Days approached and after Napoleon left Elba and marched triumphantly to Paris, gathering troops along the way. While the French troops who survived Austerlitz may have each been a “brave man,” Marshal Michel Ney was considered “the Bravest of the Brave.” “Brave,” like “great,” appears multiple times in writings of the period to describe military heroes during the Napoleonic Wars. In his memoirs, Major-General George Bell wrote of “the enthusiasm of those brave men,” who cried, “Vive l’Empereur! Vive Napoleon!”703 Thus, earning the nickname “Bravest of the Brave” reveals much about Ney. More officially, Napoleon had honored Ney as Duke of Elchingen and Prince of the Moskowa. In 1815, Ney told his soldiers that he would lead them “to the immortal phalanx which the Emperor is marching to Paris.”704

But if the Napoleon of 1812, 1813, and soon enough in 1815 as well, was Alexander, then this Napoleon was the Alexander retreating through the wastelands of the Gedrosian Desert after his army mutinied in India. As the Imperial Napoleon gave way to the Defeated Napoleon, he returned to his ideas about tragedy and greatness and exemplified them. With his army and fortunes collapsing, Napoleon’s thoughts turned to drama: “I prefer tragedy, high, sublime, as that which flowed from the pen of Corneille. There the great men are more true to life than in history: one sees them only faced by developing crises, in moments of supreme decisions, etc.” Amidst a gloomy atmosphere, Napoleon went on:

703 From The Memoirs of Major-General George Bell as quoted in “Rough Notes By an Old Soldier: ‘Man Plods His Way Through Thorns to Ashes,’” First Empire: The International Magazine for the Napoleonic Enthusiast, Historian and Gamer 95 (July/August 2007): 11.
I wonder what possesses the poets of my reign? Chenier put me out of patience with his Cambyses. Why don’t they represent Charlemagne, St. Louis, Philippe August? I have no objection either to foreign subjects. Why don’t they, for instance, take Peter the Great, that man of granite, who founded civilisation in Russia and Russian influence in Europe, and who, a century after his death, forces me to this terrible expedition.  

Napoleon, who in July of 1812 wrote about the “good and great qualities” of Tsar Alexander, also regretted “that no tragedy had been written concerning Peter the Great.”

For Napoleon, Peter the Great was a misunderstood great man, much like himself. While in in the Kremlin in 1812, Napoleon said:

As to the genius of Peter the Great, it has never been well understood. It is not realized that he acquired, through his own merits, a thing which even the greatest men lack if they are born to the throne—the triumph of having risen to the top and of having passed the test such a triumph implies. Peter the Great on his own initiative made himself an artillery lieutenant, just as I have been. He wasn’t merely playing a part. He uprooted himself in order to gain temporary freedom from his royal duties, in order to acquaint himself with everyday life and to reascend to greatness by degrees. He made himself what destiny has made me: this is what makes him unique among hereditary rulers.

Yet, Peter at least lived his last days as an emperor who had triumphed over his enemies. The sacrifices of his reign had lasting results, but what of those of Napoleon’s reign?

Thomas Campbell (1777-1844) said, “What millions died—that Caesar might be...
great!”

The same could be said about Caesar’s nineteenth-century disciple, Napoleon. Over half a million French and Russian soldiers perished in 1812 where “the temperature fell to 24 degrees Farhrenheit” by 14 November, and by the end of 1813, Napoleon the Great’s Grand Empire was in a shambles. Yet, to celebrate Napoleon’s birthday on 15 August 1813, “mounted on Mount Orgullo in six foot high letters was Vive Napoleon le Grand.” They were set alight at night to illuminate the castle.” And although the French surrendered Pamplona (Pompeiopolis), a Spanish town named for Pompey the Great, on Halloween of 1813, such was the modern Caesar’s military prestige . . . that Napoleon could still, in November 1813, have obtained terms which would have left him in possession of Belgium and the Rhine frontier, those ‘natural frontiers’ of France for which the Bourbon Louis XIV had fought in vain and which, to Frenchmen, were the prize that really mattered.

Nevertheless, no longer could Napoleon claim to be on the verge of conquering “the universe.” As some of the decreasing number of his soldiers remarked, “Now, the whole universe is against us.” In 1814, as Napoleon’s fortunes vanished, Jacque-Louis David painted Léonidas aux Thermopylae—a work evoking the memory of a heroic last stand against seemingly “impossible” odds. In that same year, while Napoleon may not have lost his life like Leonidas, for the first time in Napoleon’s career, “Napoleon the Grand

---

712 Ibid., 28.
714 Ibid., 409.
had abdicated,“\textsuperscript{716} and in the end when his final defeat came in 1815, he acknowledged that a great man was still only a man and lamented that he was not in fact divine. He exclaimed fruitlessly, “What would I not give to have the power of Joshua to stop the sun for two hours!”\textsuperscript{717} Sadly for him, as Europeans grew weary of “the glorious revolution”\textsuperscript{718} to put it mildly, the sun of Napoleonic victories had set.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{715} Prendergast, 101.
\textsuperscript{716} Major-General George Bell, “Rough Notes By an Old Soldier: ‘Man Plods His Way Through Thorns To Ashes,” First Empire: The International Magazine for the Napoleonic Enthusiast, Historian and Gamer 96 (September/October, 2007), ed. David Watkins: 15.
\textsuperscript{717} Ibid., 484.
\textsuperscript{718} Raymond P. Cusick, “The Campaign in the Basque Region of the Pyrenees,” First Empire: The International Magazine for the Napoleonic Enthusiast, Historian and Gamer 95 (July/August 2007): 30.
\end{flushright}
Chapter 5: The Defeated Napoleon

Retired French General Michel Franceschi, like so many of Napoleon’s admirers is something of a “great man” in his own right. Franceschi served as the commanding officer of a parachute company in Algeria and Superior Commander of the Armed Forces in New Caledonia before retiring as a four star Lieutenant General. Now an author and speaker, he contributes greatly to Napoleonic scholarship. In 2005, he wrote that after 1805, “It would take greatness to deal with what was in store for him [Napoleon].” But could anyone have had enough greatness to overcome such seemingly insurmountable odds? Within ten years of his greatest victory, Napoleon failed to “deal with what was in store for him.”

Some imply that as his fortunes faltered he wanted to die amidst one last triumph. When Napoleon experienced one of his final military victories at Lützen (1813), Laure Junot explained that “Napoleon probably wished to revive the recollection of Gustavus Adolphus, who died and was interred at Lützen,” noting further that Napoleon indeed “visited the tomb of Gustavus Adolphus” following the battle where he “experienced…a sort of revelation.”

719 For a more complete biography of General Franceschi, see General Michel Franceschi (Ret.), Austerlitz (Montreal: International Napoleonic Society, 2005), 38.
720 Ibid., 37.
721 Duchess Laure Junot d’Abrantès, Memoirs of Napoleon, His Court and Family, Vol. II (New
catastrophic military defeats only to live out his final days languishing in exile amidst fears that “a man more canny than us all” might be rescued and return “to the world stage.”

Regardless of Napoleon’s defeat, hero worship continued among the “people and friends” of victorious commanders, as Major-General George Bell recounts of his own reception. But at St. Helena, Napoleon was among few of his “people and friends.” Unlike the triumphant Bell, Bonaparte was trounced. Although such was the cult of Napoleon that a “New Orleans man hired a pirate ship to rescue Napoleon from St. Helene,” the attempt did not succeed.

So, what does one call a defeated great man? In 1815, the British considered many options for the vanquished Napoleon: Emperor Napoleon, First Consul Bonaparte, General, or Buonaparte—a debate that resurfaced when deciding what name to put on his St. Helena gravestone. As for Napoleon, on 13 July 1815, he wrote to the British Prince Regent: “I come, as Themistocles did, to seat myself at the hearth of the British people.”

The Defeated Napoleon during the month after Waterloo thus described himself as Themistocles (c. 524-459 B.C.), the Athenian victor at Salamis (480 B.C.) who was later ostracized and ended his life in service of the Persians; Napoleon hoped for

---

725 They left it unmarked. Markham, Napoleon for Dummies, 237, 246.
726 Napoleon, “Waterloo, 18 June 1815,” History in Quotations: Reflecting 5000 Years of World
similar treatment by the English. Nevertheless, Napoleon did not share
Themistocles’s fate. Whereas the Athenian architect of Persia’s defeat in 480 B.C.
“found a welcome in Persia,” the French enemy of Britain lived out his last days many
miles away from the British Isles. While there on an island isolated from much of the
world, Napoleon now bitterly turned to comparisons of himself with ancient defeated
heroic figures. He contrasted Britain’s treatment of himself with Rome’s treatment of
Sylla and Hannibal, the latter of whom Napoleon refers to as a “great man.” Napoleon
mistakenly claimed that Marius and Flaminius treated Sulla and Hannibal, respectively,
much more hospitably than the English treated Napoleon. But how else did the “great”
man see himself throughout the final phase of his epic life after the tragedy begun in 1814
through 1815 and who were the members of Napoleon’s personal pantheon of great men
during this last phase of his life?

This chapter is about The Defeated Napoleon of the Memorial of St. Helena,
enabling me to keep that source in its appropriate place while fully exploiting it. This
source is important, because it represents the last phase and culmination of Napoleon’s
efforts to fashion himself in the manner of a “great man” as well as his final verdict of
himself and his place in history. Over a hundred years after Napoleon’s death, Sir
Winston Churchill quipped, “History will be kind to me, for I intend to write it.”

---

727 “Au Prince Régent d’Angleterre, 14 juillet 1815,” Correspondance de Napoléon Ier publiée par
728 Ibid., 539.
729 As quoted in Emmanuel-Auguste-Dieudonné Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte Hélène: Journal of
the Private Life and Conversations of the Emperor Napoleon at Saint Helena, Vol. III (London: H.
Colburn and co., 1823), 253-254.
730 Rebecca Steuck, “Faculty Advisor Builds on Phi Alpha Theta Experience,” The News Letter
201
great Englishman who once vigorously refused a proposal to send Hitler to St. Helena, because he found such a possibility insulting to Napoleon’s memory, expressed an idea embraced by Napoleon. After all, as Napoleon believed, “It is not what is true that counts, but what people think is true.” Of course, Napoleon also claimed that “Scepticism [sic] is a virtue in history as well as philosophy.” We too must treat his own words with a degree of skepticism, as Napoleon would indeed in his final years do all he could to write his version of history and perhaps win one final victory with the pen rather than the sword.

**The Defeated Napoleon’s Heroes**

Although Bonapartism did continue to enjoy popular support following post-1815, Napoleon nevertheless had to justify the enormous human toll of his empire, a reckoning required of Alexander, Caesar, and Charlemagne as well. Indeed, even Napoleon acknowledged that he “may have been stigmatized…as the modern Attila, Robespierre on horseback, &c.” Napoleon thus used a good deal of his time to paint more favorable comparisons and contrasts of himself with the great men of world history. Napoleon justified his and his heroes’ less admirable actions by remarking, “Great men...
are never cruel without necessity.”

For Napoleon, he and his heroes did what they did for justifiable reasons. Throughout his life, Napoleon had praised certain key leaders for their pragmatism in founding intercontinental empires without allowing nationalism or religion to interfere with their policies. Although Napoleon admired the ancient Macedonians, he saw his system more as the heir to that established by the ancient Romans. Concerning the Roman elements in the Napoleonic political system established in a France first torn by civil war, then threatened with foreign invasion, the Defeated Napoleon explained to Dr. Barry Edward O’Meara (1786-1836), one of the physicians sent by the British to attend to Napoleon on St. Helena,

The system of government must be adapted to the national temperament and to circumstances. In the first place France required a strong government. While I was at the head of it, I may say that France was in the same condition as Rome when a dictator was declared necessary for the salvation of the Republic. A series of coalitions against her existence was formed by your gold amongst all the powerful nations of Europe. To resist successfully, it was necessary that all the energies of the country should be at the disposal of the chief.

In this quotation, Napoleon refers to one Roman dictator in particular: Julius Caesar.

Long before Napoleon’s defeat, Julius Caesar acquired the title Father of the Fatherland for his astonishing accomplishments. Many a leader after Caesar would similarly adopt the persona of a father figure to their subjects. At Austerlitz, a tearful Napoleon

---

735 See the entry for October 8 in Napoleon Bonaparte, The Napoleon Calendar.
738 According to Suetonius, after Caesar’s assassination, “the common people…set up a pillar of Numidian marble almost twenty feet high in the Forum and inscribed it with the words ‘To the Father of the Fatherland.’” See Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, “The Deified Julius Caesar,” Lives of the Caesars.
remarked to his army, “This is the most beautiful day of my life! You are my children!” In 1814 under vastly different circumstances when Napoleon believed he was bidding adieu to the remnants of his great army, he again called his soldiers, “my children.” And in 1815, French ministers outright said that Napoleon deserved the title “Father of the fatherland.” For Napoleon, like Caesar before him, a great man who held the reigns of power was like a father to his subjects in many manners. At that sad moment in 1814, the great father was leaving his “children” as most parents do eventually. But Napoleon was not dying nor was this his final goodbye.

At St. Helena, Napoleon declared: “The great works and monuments that I have executed, and the code of laws that I formed, will go down to the most distant ages, and future historians will avenge the wrongs done to me by contemporaries.” Regarding the first aspect of the statement, Napoleon returned to some enlightened universalism in defeat by presenting himself as an enlightened law giver who attempted to establish in Europe and its colonies uniform laws, principles, opinions, sentiments, views, and interests. Then perhaps, thanks to the spread of enlightenment, it would have become possible to apply to the great European family [the model of] the American Congress or the assemblies of Greece; and then what a perspective of force, grandeur, enjoyment, prosperity! What a grand and magnificent spectacle!


740 Markham, *Napoleon for Dummies*, 214.


After all, in Napoleon’s viewpoint, “there is no other grand equilibrium possible than the unification and confederation of the great peoples.” Who better to unify great peoples than a great man? Considering that he wrote about a “general European system” to his brother in November 1807 in a letter in which Napoleon argued that his brother’s subjects were “more enlightened in the kingdom of Westphalia than some want you to believe,” Napoleon appears to have had such aspirations during his reign as well. As for Napoleon’s role as “great man” in the making of this system, Stendhal shared such sentiments and suggested, “The more that the complete truth becomes known, the more that Napoleon’s greatness will be evident.” Napoleon, however, acknowledged the revision of history that great men usually make in their favor when he noted that a “man, to be really great, no matter in what order of greatness, must have improvised a portion of his own glory, and show himself superior to the event which he has brought about.”

To that end, Napoleon overstressed and perhaps exaggerated what he hoped to accomplish in both politics and religion. In doing so, he continued to look to the words and deeds of great thinkers and leaders alike. Napoleon, while in exile in 1816, also practically plagiarized Machiavelli’s Discourses I.XII, when Napoleon, again making a reference to the conflict between church and state, stated: “But the Vatican, too weak to

---

744 Ibid., 142.
747 See the entry for July 20 in Napoleon Bonaparte, The Napoleon Calendar: A Quotation from the Works and Sayings of Napoleon for every Day in the Year, ed. John McErlean (Mississauga: Poniard
unite all Italy under its domination, was at all times powerful enough to prevent any one republic or prince from unifying it under his authority.**748 In the process of revising his history, Napoleon again returned to comparisons between himself and Alexander the Great. For example, a reflective Napoleon explained his Egyptian expedition by remarking,

What I like in Alexander the Great is not his campaigns, which we cannot understand, but his political methods. At thirty-three he left an immense and firmly established empire, which his generals partitioned among themselves. He possessed the art of winning the love of the nations he defeated. He was right in ordering the murder of Parmenion, who like a fool had objected to Alexander’s abandonment of Greek customs.749 It was most politic of him to go to Amon [to be proclaimed a god]: it was thus he conquered Egypt. If I had remained in the East, I probably would have founded an empire like Alexander by going on pilgrimage to Mecca, where I would have prayed and kneeled.750

Knowing that he had left a rather unpopular legacy to the various peoples he conquered, the defeated Napoleon appealed to the memories of great men who were incredibly varied so as to appeal to a broad range of people. This multifaceted pantheon of heroes in this final phase of his life reminds us of his habits even when he came to power.

Consider a comparison of the personal possessions of the Republican Napoleon with the Defeated Napoleon. First Consul Bonaparte’s decorations at the palace of St.

---


749 Yes, Napoleon learned from the Revolution that politics must absorb or take into account powerful cultural customs or movements, hence his incorporation of Revolutionary language and some ideological aspects into his own image.

Cloud reveal much about the great men with whose aura he wished to surround himself while working as head of state and government. We do see some interest in monarchs in this phase. For example, Napoleon “was dissatisfied” that a portrait of Charles XII replaced one “of Gustavus Adolphus for whom he had a particular esteem.” Nevertheless, when it came to decorations of great men in the palace, the painting of the Swedish king was something of an anomaly as the emphasis overall was on ancient republican heroes. Napoleon’s workroom featured a large writing table with “two fine bronze busts of Scipio and of Hannibal” upon the mantelpiece. Claude François Méneval reports that the “only ornament of the bedroom on the ground floor…was an antique bust of Caesar…” Thus, First Consul Bonaparte not surprisingly regarded his primary heroes as fellow consuls from the late Roman Republic. The Defeated Napoleon in October 1815, possessed a large cabinet containing portraits of his family as well as an Augustus and a Livia, both exceedingly rare; a Continence of Scipio and another antique of immense value given to him by the Pope; a Peter the Great, on a box; another box with a Charles V.; another with a Turenne; and some, which were in daily use, covered with a collection of medallions of Alexander, Sylla, Mithridates, &c.

Napoleon’s apartment in 1816 featured “Frederick the Great’s large silver watch, which is sort of a morning bell. It was taken at Potsdam, and it hangs on the left of the chimney-piece, beyond the portraits.” Thus, Napoleon continued to surround himself

---

754 Emmanuel-Auguste-Dieudonné Las Cases, Mémoires de Sainte Hélène: Journal of the Private
with reminders of his great predecessors, but note also how not only do memorabilia of
heroes from the late Roman Republic remain as part of his collection, but also those of
the monarchic and imperial heroes from his imperial phase as well. What, though, does
Napoleon continue to find specifically appealing about Alexander, Augustus, Charles V,
Frederick the Great, Mithridates, Peter the Great, Scipio, Sylla, and Turenne?

In a conversation in 1816, Napoleon said, “In antiquity statesmen were also men
of letters, and men of letters were statesmen….The quality of production of the mind is in
direct ratio to the universality of its creator.” Thus, Napoleon’s pantheon of great men
were men of many talents following the ancient mold and, as we shall soon see, he
admired different great men for different reasons. The following paragraphs indicate first
those whom Napoleon admired in part for their military accomplishments followed by
those whom he admired for their mixture of political and religious leadership.

Napoleon, who “had determined on draining the Pontine marches,” because
“Caesar…was about to undertake it, when he perished,” also listed Caesar along with
Alexander, Gustavus Adolphus, Hannibal, Turenne, Eugene of Savoy, and Frederick the
Great as “the great captains whose high deeds history has transmitted to us.”

---


declared similarly that the “best troops were the Carthaginians under Hannibal; the Romans under the Scipios; the Macedonians under Alexander; and the Prussians under Frederick,” adding that his French soldiers “could most easily be rendered the best.”  

On Saint Helena, Napoleon asserted that Gustavus Adolphus’s “career has left lasting memories because of the boldness and speed of his movements and the organization and intrepidity of his troops. Gustavus Adolphus acted on the same principles as Alexander, Hannibal, and Caesar”—all of whom are great men known for more than just their military prowess. Napoleon returned to these particular men several times while in exile, typically referring to all of them together in the same passage. During another conversation, Napoleon said:

No series of great actions is the mere work of chance and fortune; it is always the result of reflection and genius. Great men rarely fail in their most perilous of undertakings. Look at Alexander, Caesar, Hannibal, the great Gustavus, and others; they always succeeded. Were they great men merely because they were fortunate? No; but because, being great men, they possessed the art of commanding fortune.

Napoleon referred to this same assembly of great men again when explaining why “he” lost in Spain:

---


760 Napoleon is, of course, incorrect here, given that Caesar suffered a defeat at Dyrrhachium in 48 B.C. and Hannibal at Zama in 202 B.C. Great men did not “always succeed.”

No one can deny, that if the Court of Austria, instead of declaring war had allowed Napoleon to remain four months longer in Spain, all would have been over. The presence of a general is indispensable; he is the head, the whole of an army. It was not the Roman army that subdued Gaul, but Caesar himself: nor was it the Carthaginian army that made the Republic tremble at the gates of Rome, but Hannibal himself; neither was it the Macedonian army which reached the Indus, but Alexander; it was not the French army which carried the war to to the Wesser and the Inn, but Turenne; nor was it the Prussian army, which for seven years, defended Prussia against the three greatest powers of Europe, it was Frederick the Great.762

Evidence reveals that Napoleon actually admired more than just these men’s tactical or strategic brilliance, as Napoleon outrightly asserts in a discussion about Alexander:

“Alexander proved himself at once a distinguished warrior, politician, and legislator.”763

This description of Alexander as “warrior, politician, and legislator” mirrors the accolades Napoleon heaped upon Homer. In a conversation in 1816, Napoleon said, “The Iliad...is, like Genesis and the whole Bible, the symbol and token of its age. In composing it, Homer was poet, orator, historian, legislator, geographer, theologian: he was the encyclopedist of his era.”764 Both men, Alexander and Homer, earned Napoleon’s admiration for possessing multiple talents. Looking back on his Republican phase, Napoleon appealed to the memories of both men. The Napoleon of 1816 declared


that “Greece awaits a liberator!...He will inscribe his name forever with those of Homer, Plato, and Epaminondas!—I perhaps was not far from it! —When, during my campaign in Italy, I arrived on the shores of the Adriatic, I wrote to the Directory, that I had before my eyes the kingdom of Alexander!” Napoleon considers a liberator in the same breath as an epic poet (Homer), a philosopher (Plato), and a Theban general (Epaminondas), while once again returning to the great captain Alexander as his main inspiration.

Napoleon noted further that “knowledge of grand tactics is gained only by experience and by the study of the history of the campaigns of all [my italics] the great captains,” i.e. not just those of France, that all “great captains have accomplished great things only by conforming to the rules and natural principles of the art of war,” and that what sets “a great general” apart “is that his intelligence or talent be balanced by his character or courage.” Thus, we see that he admired military heroes for a combination of tactical brilliance and “character or courage.” Intelligence and valor are attributes that civilians can also possess and thus it is not surprising given his comments that his heroes throughout his life included both non-military figures and military figures that he admired for more than just simply their ability to win battles. We must also keep in mind that these are human traits rather than just French traits. With that in mind, the allusion to Alexander the Great could appeal to many Europeans and by adding the remarks about Mecca, perhaps even Muslim readers of these words could find a great man parallel.

---

between Napoleon and earlier heroes.

From 1816 through 1817, he continued to describe his affection for various ancient and medieval heroes known for a mixture of military and religious achievements. As late as 1816, Napoleon again spoke of Islam as “a promise and thus a religion of appeal” and in 1817, he expressed clear admiration for Mohammed’s accomplishments, going so far as to call the prophet “a great man,” in the respect that he “would have become a god if the revolution which he precipitated had not been prepared by circumstances.” Napoleon explained further that “Moses and Mohammed were national leaders who gave laws and ruled the affairs of this world.” For Napoleon, Mohammed was therefore a great man because of a mixture of political and religious achievements. Yet, when it came to explaining Napoleon’s seemingly pro-Islamic policies during the Republican Phase, Napoleon looked to a French king as his model rather than to a Muslim. In April 1816, indicating a chance during empire, Napoleon remarked, “Henry IV. said, ‘Paris is well worth a mass.’ Will it then be said that the dominion of the East, and perhaps the subjugation of all Asia, were not worth a turban

---

766 Ibid., 48-49.
and a pair of trowsers [sic]?\(^{770}\) Napoleon’s praise of Islamic figures, though, seems to stem in part from his understanding of a larger religious tradition that binds Judaism, Christianity, and Islam together. Napoleon asserted that these “three religions that have spread the knowledge of an immortal God, uncreated, master and creator of man, all originated in Arabia. Moses, Christ, Mohammed were Arabs, born in Memphis, in Nazareth [sic], in Mecca.”\(^{771}\) Napoleon goes on to note how the world’s religious laws all come from great men from this region of the world. He also explained his pragmatism in using specific political-religious great men by asserting, “If I governed a community of Jews, I would rebuild the temple of Solomon.”\(^{772}\) Yet, Napoleon credits such pagans as “the Scipios, the Caesars, the Trajans” with making Rome the capital of Christendom due to their effectiveness of spreading Rome’s control over three continents rather than actual Christian leaders.\(^{773}\) Instead, Napoleon praised great Christian emperors for other achievements and policies.

The Defeated Napoleon reinforced his earlier remarks about imperial religious pluralism and Caesaropapist conciliarism by lamenting how he “should have controlled the religious as well as the political world, and summoned Church Councils like


\(^{773}\) “Campagnes d’Egypte et de Syrie,” Correspondance de Napoléon Ier, publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III, Vol. XXIX (Paris: Plon and Dumaine, 1858-70), 475-78; see also Napoleon
Constantine.” In a conversation during his exile in 1816, Napoleon, identifying the struggle between church and state, said,

I would have called religious as well as legislative bodies into session; my church councils would have been representative of all Christendom, and the popes would have been mere chairmen. I would have opened and closed these assemblies, approved and made public their decisions, as did Constantine and Charlemagne. Here we see Napoleon continuing to regard Charlemagne and Constantine as models and not for their numerous military campaigns, but rather for their religious activities and for allowing for deliberative bodies to assist in decision-making, although in at least Napoleon’s case, he completely dominated them.

Just as the Imperial Napoleon had done earlier, the Defeated Napoleon again compared and contrasted himself with Charles V when it came to capturing the pope. Napoleon explained, “I considered that Charles V, who was more religious than me, and not so powerful, had dared to make a Pope a prisoner. He was no more worse for it, and I thought I might at least attempt as much.” Actually, it was not his idea. Thus, in defeat, Napoleon reaffirmed what he had said during his reign regarding which Roman emperors he admired and why. The Caesars and Trajan deserved praise for political and military expansion, Constantine and Charlemagne for political and religious leadership, and finally Charles V for audacity when dealing with the pope. In Napoleon’s mind, he


Felix Markham, 150.

As quoted in Comte Emmanuel de Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte Hélène (Paris: H. L. Delloye, 1840), 17 August 1816; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, “Conversation, 1816, on his plans after the annexation of the Papal States in 1809,” The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words, 270-271.

Napoleon, an Explanation of His Theories of Government: An Avowal of the Motives that Actuated His Public Life (Pueblo: The Franklin Press Company, 1907), 84.
fulfilled all three roles by attempting to make Paris rather than Rome the capital of the West, calling an international church council in 1811, and essentially holding the pope prisoner for several years. In one of Napoleon’s memoirs from St. Helena, Charles-Tristan Montholon explained Napoleon’s goals with regards to his transferring of the pope from Italy to France and in calling a church council as follows:

The whole quarter of Notre Dame, and the Isle of Saint Louis, were to become the central seat of Christianity. The Grand Empire comprised five-sixths of Christian Europe;—France, Italy, Spain, the Confederation of the Rhine, and Poland. It was therefore proper, for the interests of religion, that the Pope should establish his residence at Paris, and unite the See of Nôtre Dame with that of the Lateran.

The most natural method of accelerating this revolution, and of inducing the Popes themselves to be desirous of this residence, seemed to be the restoration of the authority of Councils; which being composed of the bishops of France, Italy, Spain, Germany, and Poland, would in fact be General Councils. The Pope would feel the importance of placing himself at their head; and, consequently, the necessity of residing in the capital of the Grand Empire. This was the secret object of the Council of 1811, the apparent purpose of which was to provide the means of conferring canonical institution on the bishops. The energy and resistance of the Council were agreeable to the Emperor: nothing but the spirit of opposition could confer any consideration on these assemblies so inconsistent with the spirit of the age. He secretly commanded that the forms of the Council of Embrun, which was a Council against the Jansenists, should be adopted on this occasion: they were all in the spirit of the Court of Rome. This Council dictated the brief of Savona, which accomplished the ostensible end of the convocation, by providing for the articles which it had not been thought advisable to insert in the Concordat of 1801.777

The above after the fact explanation corresponds with Napoleon’s other statements both during his exile and late in his imperial phase and suggests that Napoleon regarded himself as indeed a great man in the manner of a Constantine at the head of a European empire and with sufficient religious authority to move even the pope.

But to what extent did Napoleon ever show evidence during his actual reign of not just religious but also political conciliarism in the manner of great men of old? In 1813, when his falling military star seemed to have gone supernova, he attempted to play the role of great statesmen by conferring with all of Western Civilization’s great statesmen. The failing Emperor Napoleon

proposed the meeting of a congress at Prague for a general peace. On the side of France there would arrive at this congress the plenipotentiaries of France, those of the United States of America, of Denmark, the King of Spain and all the allied princes; and on the opposite side those of England, Russia, Prussia, the Spanish insurgents and the other allies of that belligerent mass. In this congress would be established the basis of a long peace. . . .

If England, from that feeling of egotism on which her policy is founded, refuses to co-operate in this grand work of the peace of the world because she wishes the exclude the universe from that element which constitutes three-fourths of the globe, the Emperor, nevertheless, proposes a meeting at Prague of the plenipotentiaries of all the belligerent powers to settle the peace of the Continent. His Majesty even offers to stipulate at the moment when the congress shall be formed, an armistice between the different armies, in order to put a stop to the effusion of human blood.

These principles are comfortable with the views of Austria. It now remains to be seen what the courts of England, Russia, and Prussia will do.

The distance of the United States of America ought not to form a reason for excluding them. The congress might still be opened, and deputies of the United States would have time to arrive before the conclusion of the discussions, in order to stipulate for their rights and their interests. 778

Eventually the Wars of the Coalitions or Napoleonic Wars did end with a great peace congress of some of the greatest leaders of the day, only sans Napoleon. His attempts at peace failed. When the allied armies entered Paris, he informed his French subjects that he “made an offer of peace to the Emperor Alexander, a peace purchased at the cost of great sacrifices: France with her old boundaries, renouncing her conquests and giving up

149.

778 Napoleon Bonaparte, “Moniteur, 24 May 1813” in Imperial Glory: The Bulletins of Napoleon’s
all we had gained since the Revolution.”

France did renounce its conquests, but it renounced Napoleon as well.

His heroes remained not limited to Antiquity or the Middle Ages, nor to conquerors who aimed at universal monarchy. While in exile on St. Helena, Napoleon continued to esteem former Second Consul Cambacérès as a “man of merit,” “distinguished,” “wise,” and “moderate.”

Concerning Charles James Fox (1749-1806), Napoleon said that the British Whig statesman was sincere and honest in his intentions; had he lived, there would have been a peace, and England would now be contented and happy. Fox knew the true interests of your country. He was received with a sort of triumph in every city in France through which he passed. Fêtes, and every honour the inhabitants could confer, were spontaneously offered, wherever he was known. It must have been a most gratifying sensation to him to be received in such a manner by a country which had been so long hostile to his own, particularly when he saw that they were the genuine sentiments of the people. Pitt, probably, would have been murdered. I liked Fox, and loved to converse with him. A circumstance occurred, which although accidental, must have been very flattering to him. As I paid him every attention, I gave orders that he should have free admission every where. One day he went with his family to see St. Cloud, in which there was a private cabinet of mine, that had not been opened for some time, and was never shown to strangers. By some accident Fox and his wife opened the door, and entered. There he saw the statues of a number of great men, chiefly patriots, such as Sidney, Hampden, Washington, Cicero, &c., Lord Chatham, and amongst the rest, his own, which was first recognised by his wife, who said, “My dear, this is yours.” This little incident, although trifling and accidental, gained him great honour, and spread directly through Paris. The fact was, that a considerable time before, I had determined upon forming a collection of statues of the greatest men, and the most distinguished for their virtues, of all nations. I did not admire them the less because they were enemies, and had actually procured busts of some of the greatest enemies of France, amongst others, that of Nelson. I was afterwards

---

779 Napoleon Bonaparte, “Speech of Napoleon to his Guard when he learned the allied forces had entered Paris” in Imperial Glory: The Bulletins of Napoleon’s Grande Armée 1805-1814 (London: Greenhill Books, 2003), edited by J. David Markham, 424.

diverted from this intention by occurrences which did not allow me time to attend to the collecting of statues. 781

Here Napoleon simultaneously reaffirms his interest in international patriotic heroes from during his actual time in power that was so strong that he actually began collecting busts of these men while revealing who his heroes were then and into his later years. Although his comments about Fox suggest that Napoleon may not have thought so fondly of William Pitt the Younger, Napoleon continued to admire other British politicians and notably those who were not fellow monarchs. While none should be surprised to see Napoleon include an ancient Roman in the list above, one may feel some surprise that here Napoleon looks to Cicero rather than some emperor. Those specifically mentioned above worked in many careers, from Nelson in the British navy to the aforementioned politicians. Yet, only Washington served as a head of state. Perhaps most remarkable is that his admiration for great Englishman in his youth and imperial years continued during his years while exiled by the English who ultimately defeated him. Finally, Napoleon once again reaffirms his placement of George Washington among history’s great men, something Napoleon returns to at various times during his exile.

In 1816, Napoleon said in a conversation to an English person:

Your nation [the British] called Washington a leader of rebels for a long time and refused to acknowledge either him or the independence of his country; but his success obliged them [the British] to change their minds and acknowledge both. It is success which makes the great men. 782

---

782 As quoted in Barry E. O’Meara, Napoleon in Exile; or, A Voice from St. Helena, Vol. I (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1822), 105; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, “Conversation, 1816, reported in English,” The Mind of Napoleon, 42.
We see two interesting points made in this statement as pertains to my study. First, Napoleon continues to regard Washington as a general turned republican president as a great man. Second, Washington is great because he succeeded. Had he failed, he would be remembered as merely “a leader of rebels”. Ironic then that Napoleon experienced a different fate, yet still clung to the idea that he too ranked among the broader pantheon of great men.

The Defeated Napoleon’s Anti-heroes

If great tragedy was the school of great men, then Napoleon the Great experienced almost relentless tragedy in his later years. In exile, never to see his wife or son again, he reflected on the successes and failures of himself and other great people. In September 1816, Napoleon said dismissively that “The letters of Madame de Sevigne are like snow-eggs, one can eat plentifully of them without overloading the stomach.”

On Saint Helena, Napoleon declared to Las Cases that Pitt “set fire to the universe [my italics] . . . in the manner of a Herostratus”—an Ephesian who sought immortality by burning down the Temple of Artemis on the same night that Alexander the Great happened to be born in 356 B.C. Throughout his life, Napoleon uttered many statements of praise for Louis

783 See the entry for July 6 in The Napoleon Calendar.
784 The Temple was restored on the death of Alexander in 323 B.C. Jean-Claude Damamme, The International Napoleonic Society presents Iena, 1806: The Battle that Napoleon did not want (Montreal: Copies Campus, 2006), 14, 17. Napoleon had a far more favorable, but equally relevant opinion of another prominent British politician who died in 1806: Charles James Fox. Both Fox and Napoleon reacted favorably to each other, and Fox went so far as to tip off Talleyrand and Napoleon to a plot to assassinate Napoleon. Naturally, Napoleon lamented that Fox’s death “was one of the tragedies of my career,” because Fox and Napoleon working together might have served “the interests of peoples” and “established a new
XIV, the so-called “Sun-King,” and mentioned some of Louis XIV’s policies as legal precedents. In the early years of Napoleon’s exile, he still explained how he tried to continue “in my own dynasty the family system of Louis XIV, and of binding Spain to the destinies of France.” Nevertheless, by 1820, Napoleon declared that “Louis XIV was a great king. . . . But the revocation of the Edict of Nantes [that led to a mass exodus of Protestants from France] . . . the papal bull Unigenitus [that condemned Jansenism] . . . Alas, are there not spots even on the sun?” In this statement Napoleon acknowledged that great men are not perfect men. Thus, during his reign, he recognized the value of re-implementing some, but not all, of Louis XIV’s political-religious ideas, while also appreciating the goals of religious toleration espoused by Jansenists and Gallicans at least from the mid-eighteenth century and continuing through the French Revolution.

The Defeated Napoleon on St. Helena indeed lashed out at the memories of France’s most famous kings on numerous occasions, including those he earlier praised. In 1816, he said that “Henry IV never did anything great; he used to give 1,500 francs to his mistress” and called “Saint Louis…an imbecile.” The next year, Napoleon asserted

---


that “Henry IV…accomplished nothing out of the ordinary; and when that gray-beard ran after the wenches in the streets of Paris, he was just an old fool. But in order to have a foil to Louis XIV, who was hated, he was praised to the skies.”

Remarkably, Napoleon deprecated Francis I for not adopting Protestantism and declaring “himself the head of it in Europe.” As Napoleon explained:

Had Francis I embraced Lutheranism, which is favourable to royal supremacy, he would have preserved France from the dreadful religious convulsions brought on, at later periods, by the Calvinists, whose efforts, altogether republican, were on the point of subverting the throne, and dissolving our noble monarchy. Unfortunately, Francis I was ignorant of all that…Francis I was, after all, but a hero for tilts and tournaments, and a gallant for the drawing-room, one of those pigmy great men.

Thus, we once again see the importance Napoleon attached to religious leadership for great kings and we also see that for the defeated Napoleon, not all “great” men really deserved the accolade.

While on St. Helena Napoleon’s critical analysis of kings was not limited to those of France. Just as Napoleon had at times praised some of the above indicated French kings whom he also criticized, so too did Napoleon treat Gustavus Adolphus:

Just look at the man men call the great Gustavus! In eighteen months he won one battle, lost another, and was killed in a third! His fame was assuredly gained at a cheap rate….Now look at Gustavus, whom history exalts as an extraordinary man…Tilly and Wallenstein were better generals than Gustavus Adolphus. There is no very able military movement recorded of the Swedish King. He quitted

---


Bavaria because of the strategic movements of Tilly, which forced him to evacuate the country, and he let Magdeburg be captured before his very eyes. There’s a splendid reputation for you!\textsuperscript{790}

In the same discussion, Napoleon went on to contrast his participation in great battles at Austerlitz, Essling, Ulm, and Wagram with Gustavus’s mere three. Thus, at this moment, Napoleon used Gustavus as a contrast to Napoleon, i.e. implying that Napoleon was the greater man of the two.

Other leaders whom Napoleon typically praised received negative comparisons with Napoleon. Napoleon asserted that his “account of my campaign in Egypt is at least in one respect better than the commentaries of Cæsar, which have no dates.”\textsuperscript{791} Yet, Napoleon also noticed some similarities as well, but even here these are rather unpleasant. Napoleon told Baron Gaspard Gougaud (1783-1852) about how when Napoleon “was young I wanted to write something about Cæsar” and Gourgaud replied that Napoleon “has made history.” Napoleon remarked, “Who? I? Ah! but the end needed success. It is true that Cæsar himself cannot be said to have succeeded. He was assassinated.”\textsuperscript{792} Napoleon explained further that “Caesar, knowing the men who wanted to get rid of him, ought to have got rid of them first.”\textsuperscript{793}


\textsuperscript{791} As quoted in Baron Gaspard Gourgaud, \textit{Talks of Napoleon at St. Helena with General Baron Gourgaud, together with the Journal Kept by Gourgaud on Their Journey from Waterloo to St. Helena}, trans. Elizabeth Worneley Latimer (Adamant Media Corporation and Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 209.

\textsuperscript{792} As quoted in Baron Gaspard Gourgaud, \textit{Talks of Napoleon at St. Helena with General Baron Gourgaud, together with the Journal Kept by Gourgaud on Their Journey from Waterloo to St. Helena}, trans. Elizabeth Worneley Latimer (Adamant Media Corporation and Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 209-209.

\textsuperscript{793} See the entry for June 30 in \textit{The Napoleon Calendar: A Quotation from the Works and Sayings of Napoleon Bonaparte}, trans. Elizabeth Worneley Latimer (Adamant Media Corporation and Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 209-
Napoleon did not limit his criticisms in this phase to rulers. We have seen earlier in this chapter military men whom Napoleon admired. Consider now those he loathed. In 1816, he received news from France that “statues…were to be erected to the memory of Moreau and Pichegru.” Napoleon’s reaction bordered on outrage:

A statue to Moreau…whose conspiracy in 1803 is now so well proved! Moreau, who, in 1813, died fighting under the Russian standard! A monument to the memory of Pichegru, who was guilty of one of the most heinous of crimes! who purposely suffered himself to be defeated, and who connived with the enemy in the slaughter of his own troops! And after all…history is made up of reports which gain credit by repetition. Because it has been repeatedly affirmed that these were great men, who deserved well of their country, they will at length pass for such, and their adversaries will be despised.

Napoleon hardly revered these particular men in his previous phases, but what of those whom Napoleon did admire at various points in his life?

This antithesis of hero worship even applied to Alexander, whom Napoleon throughout his life usually praised. In 1817, however, he more critically remarked:

When one examines the exploits of Agesilaus and the defeat of Xerxes’ army at Marathon by ten thousand Greeks, it becomes obvious how few were the obstacles that Alexander had to overcome in defeating his enemies. He gave only a few battles, and his triumphs were due to the order of the phalanx rather than his generalship. In all his campaigns it is impossible to discover a single fine maneuver worthy of a great general.

---

795 …which oddly enough is exactly what Napoleon hoped to achieve for himself with these St. Helena memoirs.
Napoleon criticized Alexander in other conversations during this phase as well:

Alexander, when scarcely beyond the age of boyhood, with a mere handful of troops, conquered a quarter of the globe. ... Unfortunately, on attaining the zenith of glory and success, his head was turned, and his heart corrupted. He commenced his career with the mind of Trajan; but he closed it with the heart of Nero, and the manners of Heliogabalus.

Las Cases reports that Napoleon then contrasted Alexander with yet another Roman, this time Caesar, remarking

that he, the reverse of Alexander, had commenced his career at an advanced period of life; that his youth had been passed in indolence and vice; but that he had ultimately evinced the most active and elevated mind. He thought him one of the most amiable characters in history.

To Montholon, Napoleon actually negatively compared himself to Alexander, saying:

Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself have founded empires. But upon what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force! Jesus Christ alone, founded His empire upon love; and at this moment millions of men would die for Him. I die before my time, and my body will be given back to earth, to become food for worms. Such is the fate of him who has been called the Great Napoleon. What an abyss between my deep misery and the eternal kingdom of Christ, which is proclaimed, loved, and adored, and which is extended over the whole earth?

Here, we see Napoleon considering many attributes of what makes men great or rather not great, ranging from political and religious policies to military prowess, which is consistent with how Napoleon molded his cult of great men since the time he began writing about them. We also get a sense of both objectivity and bitterness from the

---

798 Napoleon is factually wrong again, as any map of Alexander’s empire would reveal, he did not conquer a quarter of the globe.
800 Ibid., 190.
801 Napoleon Buonaparte, The Table Talk And Opinions Of Napoleon Buonaparte (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1868), 78.
defeated man. No longer do we have Napoleon using hyperbole to praise men whom he sought to connect himself with throughout his life, even though on some occasions during his exile he would again marvel at these men’s achievements.

The barbed tongue (and pen) of the defeated Napoleon also lashed out at the memory of the great artists and scientists he had marveled at, especially those during his republican phase. Long before his defeat, in 1802, Napoleon wrote to French chemist and statesman Comte Jean-Antoine Claude Chaptal de Chanteloup (1756-1832):

I desire to award, as an encouragement, the sum of six thousand francs to the person who through his experiments and discoveries will advance our knowledge of electricity and galvanism by as great a stride as Franklin and Volta did….It is my specific aim to encourage physicists to concentrate their attention on that particular branch of physics, which is in my opinion the road to the great discoveries. 802

We see in this excerpt which scientists and which specific kinds of scientists Napoleon admired during his consular period when he could offer these men material rewards for their achievements. As earlier chapters have revealed, Napoleon admired and honored a veritable cornucopia of diverse great scientists as well as great artists and politicians. On St. Helena, however, Napoleon was no longer in a position to award anyone much of anything. Instead, by 1816 he sharply ridiculed scientists Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) and Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828)803 and mocked Diderot as “that Coryphæus of


803 For the source of this quotation, see comte Emmanuel de Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte Hélène (Paris: H. L. Delloye, 1840), 22 July 1816; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, “Conversation, 1816,” The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words, ed. J. Christopher Herold (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 141.
When it came to Napoleon’s ministers, he contrasted Gaudin and Mollien with Defermonts, Lacuée, and Marbois. Napoleon said, “For my own part, I was inclined to be of the opinion of the first, considering the views of the last to be narrow… I called them the Puritans and the Jansenists of the profession.” Napoleon is using the term “Jansenism” in a derogatory sense here. Given some of Napoleon’s fawning over great men throughout his life, the Defeated Napoleon in 1816 ironically or maybe even hypocritically criticized historians for erroneously, foolishly, and ridiculously applauding “so highly the continence of Scipio, and” falling “into ecstasies at the calmness of Alexander, Caesar, and others, for having been able to sleep on the eve of a battle…” Concerning a specific historian, Napoleon “complained that the narrative” in Charles Rollin’s History of Alexander’s expedition “was destitute of taste, and without any proper plan. He observed, that it afforded no just idea of the grand views of Alexander…” Napoleon also “expressed his dislike” for Racine’s Alexander, and further criticized the playwright for not knowing geography and even the ancient king.

---

805 Gaudin served as the Minister of Finances from 1799 to 1814 and again in 1815.
806 Mollien served in various posts pertaining to finance, the state, and the treasury.
807 Marbois served as a senator and head of the treasury under the Consulate and Empire.
811 Ibid., 340.
812 For the source of this quotation, see Gaspard Gourgaud, Sainte Hélène: Journal inédit de 1815
Mithridates as depicted by Racine for lacking “good sense.” So declared the same Napoleon, a man twice exiled who dreamed during both exiles of a “come-back,” who at another time said he “always admired Mithridates contemplating the conquest of Rome when he was vanquished and a fugitive.” On balance, the defeated Napoleon Bonaparte was more cynical than before.

The Defeated Napoleon’s thoughts concerning non-military figures changed as well compared to earlier. While he continued to prefer Corneille, Napoleon “grew fonder of [the tragedian] Racine,” but expressed “distaste” for Voltaire whom Napoleon earlier praised as First Consul. In defeat, Napoleon opined that Voltaire “is full of bombast and tick.” In particular, Napoleon criticized Voltaire’s dramatic depiction of two great men and one great woman: Brutus, Tullia, and Mohammed. Concerning the former, Napoleon said:

The Romans…were guided by patriotism as we are by honour. Voltaire has not portrayed the real sublimity of Brutus, sacrificing his sons, for the welfare of his country, and in spite of the pangs of paternal affection. He has made him a monster of pride, decreeing the death of his children, for the sake of preserving his power, his name, and his celebrity. The other characters of the tragedy…are equally misconceived, Tullia is described as a fury who takes advantage of her situation; and not as a woman of tender sentiment…

---


813 For the source of this quotation, see comte Emmanuel de Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte Hélène (Paris: H. L. Delloye, 1840), 15 November 1816; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, “Conversation, 1816, related by Las Cases,” The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words, ed. J. Christopher Herold (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 151.

814 See the entry for October 13 in The Napoleon Calendar.


816 Ibid., 330-331.
Regarding the latter, Napoleon scorned Voltaire’s presentation of Mohammad as “merely an impostor and tyrant, without representing him as a great man.” Napoleon explained that Voltaire has degraded Mahomet, by making him descend to the lowest intrigues. He has represented a great man who changed the face of the world, acting like a scoundrel, worthy of the gallows. He has no less absurdly travestied the character of Omar, which he has drawn like that of a cut-throat in a melo-drama.

Whereas Napoleon continued to identify Mohammad as a great man, regarding Voltaire’s alleged greatness, the Napoleon of 1816 said, “If Voltaire ruled contemporary opinion, if he was the hero of his age, this was only because it was an age of dwarfs.” In 1816, Napoleon similarly insisted that “Voltaire…had only exercised so powerful an influence over his contemporaries, and had been considered the great man of his age, because all around him were pygmies.” In that same year Napoleon had earlier derided Voltaire’s “pompous diction.” Consider how much Napoleon’s views had changed from 1803 when Napoleon said, “The more I read Voltaire the better I like him. That man is always

---

817 Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, *Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte: To which are Added an Account of the Important Events of the Hundred Days, of Napoleon's Surrender to the English, and of His Residence and Death at St. Helena, with Anecdotes and Illustrative Extracts from All the Most Authentic Sources*, Vol. IV, ed. R. W. Phipps (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1889), 369.


819 For the source of this quotation, see comte Emmanuel de Las Cases, *Mémorial de Sainte Hélène* (Paris: H. L. Delloye, 1840), 1 June 1816; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, “Conversation, 1816, related by Las Cases,” *The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words*, ed. J. Christopher Herold (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 156.


reasonable, not a charlatan, not a fanatic….I even like his historical writings a good deal…His *Pucelle*…cheers the mature." He seems to be succumbing to the Romantic tide here.

In 1816, Las Cases reports that the “Emperor…continued…to review the leading men of that period.” Specifically, Napoleon spoke at length on Lafayette, the geometrician Gaspard Monge (1746-1818), and Henri Grégoire. In these instances, Napoleon identified both faults and strengths. He called Lafayette a “simpleton” who could easily be duped but did so without attacking his “sentiments of intentions.”

Napoleon said that Monge “might be considered a terrible man” who maintained…that all the nobility should be put to death…Yet, Monge was one of the mildest and weakest men living, and would not allow a chicken to be killed, if he were obliged to do it himself, or see it be done. This furious republican, as he believed himself, cherished, however, a kind of worship for me, which he pushed to adoration.

Regarding Grégoire, Napoleon scrutinized the *abbé*’s religious stances and asserted this “man’s lot…is decidedly east. If he be driven from France, he must take refuge in Saint-Domingo. The friend, the advocate, the eulogist of the negroes will be a god, or a saint among them.” In May 1816, Napoleon had similarly declared that “Gregoire…has

---


824 As quoted in Ibid., 167.

825 As quoted in Ibid., 168.

only to go to Haiti, and he would immediately be made a Pope.”

Just as Napoleon’s long-term heroes lost some of their luster in his eyes during his years in exile, various contemporaries whom he regarded with some degree of derision during his reign enjoyed a measure of rehabilitation in the defeated man’s reflections. Even during the Hundred Days, Napoleon realized toward religion:

I was blind. I always believed the pope to be a man of very weak character. When he began to resist me, I charged it to his weakness, which made him give in to the bad advice of his entourage. I wanted to isolate him. He continued to resist. I treated him harshly. I was wrong. I was blind.

By 1816, Napoleon’s discussion of the pope, a religious leader, mirrored some of the hero worship he heaped upon political and military leaders: “Pius VII is a real lamb, a wholly good man, a truly upright man whom I esteem, of whom I am very fond, and who, for his part, reciprocates my feeling to some extent I am sure.” Thus, in the period following Napoleon’s defeat, we actually see occasions in which Napoleon offers more praise to a contemporary religious leader, such as Pius VII, than to an ancient military leader such as Alexander the Great. Other contemporaries, however, i.e. those previously glorified by Napoleon, declined in the defeated man’s view.

About Joachim Napoléon Murat, whom his Neapolitan subjects considered “the

---

828 For the source of this quotation, see Interview with Father Maurice of Brescia, as told in Théodore Iung, Lucien Bonaparte et ses mémoires, 1775-1840, Vol. III (Paris: Charpentier, 1882-83), 237; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, “Conversation, 1815, during the Hundred Days,” The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words, ed. J. Christopher Herold (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 110.
829 For the source of this quotation, see comte Emmanuel de Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte Hélène (Paris: H. L. Delloye, 1840), 17 August 1816; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, “Conversation, 1816,” The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words, ed. J. Christopher Herold (New
King of Feathers” and whom at an earlier time Napoleon granted the title of “First Horseman in Europe,” 830 Napoleon said,

was one of several that I made too great; I elevated him beyond his level. It is difficult to conceive of a greater turpitude than that displayed in his late proclamation. He says it is time to choose between two banners, that of virtue and that of crime. And it is Murat, my work, who would have been nothing without me, the husband of my sister, who writes these words. It would be difficult to abandon a sinking cause with greater brutality, or to embrace new fortunes with more shameless treachery.831

In this statement, not only do we see the failings of a great man, but also the revelation by Napoleon that great men can be made by other greater men. We moreover see Napoleon’s realization that some men, particularly those in his family, might not have really been “great” after all, a realization he not surprisingly also had concerning Bernadotte, a member of Napoleon’s extended family and former marshal of France. As Napoleon put it in 1816, “Bernadotte was the snake we sheltered in our bosom.”832 Thus, we see that the defeated Napoleon regretted aggrandizing some of his contemporaries.

In another statement, he lamented that had each of his siblings

given a common impulse to the different masses I had entrusted to them to rule, we could have marched together to the poles; everything would have fallen before us; we should have changed the face of the globe. I did not have the good fortune of Genghis Khan, with his four sons, who knew no other rivalry than that of serving him faithfully.833

Of course, Napoleon fails to note that the Mongol Empire created by Genghis Khan

830 Frank B. Goodrich, “At the Court of Napoleon,” Napoleonic Society of America Member’s Bulletin 82 (Summer/Fall, 2006): 13.
831 Goodrich, “At the Court of Napoleon,” 13.
832 For the source of this quotation, see comte Emmanuel de Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte Hélène (Paris: H. L. Delloye, 1840), 7 August 1816; see also Napoleon Bonaparte, “Conversation, 1816,” The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words, ed. J. Christopher Herold (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 175.
broke apart within a couple generations as well. Thus, we see that the Defeated
Napoleon, while still imagining himself in the lineage of such great heroes from history
as Alexander the Great, also recognized the failures and shortcomings of both great men
he had previously compared himself to as well as of the “great” contemporaries he
glorified throughout his reign.

Napoleon the Great?

Amidst these reflections on history’s great heroes and villains, Napoleon reflected
on himself as a “great man.” Napoleon said, “A man, to be really great, no matter in
what order of greatness, must have improvised a portion of his own glory, and shown
himself superior to the event which he has brought about.”834 Napoleon also asserted, “Is
it because they were lucky that great men become great? No, but being great, they have
been able to master luck.”835 Thus, to Napoleon great challenges or events are not the
only things that make great men. Such men from antiquity to modern times have
something in them that makes them great and gives them enduring and in some cases
almost universal appeal.836

Evidence in the St. Helena memoirs and the remarks taken down by Las Cases

833 Ibid., 13.
834 See the entry for July 20 in Bonaparte, The Napoleon Calendar: A Quotation from the Works
and Sayings of Napoleon for Every Day in the Year.
835 Ernest Butner, The Mind of Napoleon on American Battlefields Discussion (accessed 26 May
836 The “universal genius” of great, yet still flawed, men, whether it be Napoleon or his heroes,
persisted throughout the long nineteenth century. After all, Joseph Conrad employed that very phrase to
describe Mr. Kurtz in 1902. Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (New York: Dover Thrift Editions, 1990),
reveals that Napoleon considered himself to be a “great man” in a category with the great
men he most admired. For example, in a conversation in November 1815, Napoleon
said:

When I took power, people would have liked me to be another Washington….If I
had been in America, I would gladly have been a Washington, and without
deserving much credit for it; indeed I don’t see how it could have been reasonably
possible to act otherwise. But if Washington had been a Frenchman, at a time
when France was crumbling inside and invaded from outside, I would have dared
him to be himself; or, if he had persisted in being himself, he would merely have
been a fool and would have prolonged his country’s misfortunes. As for me, I
could only be a crowned Washington. And I could become that only at a congress
of kings, surrounded by sovereigns whom I had either persuaded or mastered.
Then, and then only, could I have profitably displayed Washington’s moderation,
disinterestedness, and wisdom. In all reason, I could not attain this goal except by
means of world dictatorship. I tried it. Can it be held against me? 837

Thus, his revisions of opinions about the “great men” he admired before are part of a
process whereby he settled on what he thought “great” about himself. As a defeated man,
he emphasized his role as law codifier—an accomplishment that clearly outlasted
him—in relation to his role as military general, a career that ended badly.

As Napoleon explained at another time during his exile:

Up to my time France still felt the influence of Cæsar. The supremacy of the
Pope, the Empire of Germany, and the King of the Romans were all destroyed by
me. Charlemagne had given a good deal to the Pope. Germany, up to my day,
was composed of great fiefs. At one time one of its Emperors named Maximilian
created counts and barons in the Parliament of Paris.

No one at length dared to oppose Cæsar. Men are truly great according to
what institutions they leave behind them. If a cannon-ball, fired from the
Kremlin, had killed me, I should have been as great as they, because my
institutions and my dynasty would have remained in France; instead of which I
shall now be almost nothing, unless my son should one day reascend my

24.
837 As quoted in Comte Emmanuel de Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte Hélène (Paris: H. L. Delloye, 1840),
29-30 November 1815.
Napoleon sees Caesar, Charlemagne, and Maximilian as great men because of their institutional achievements. Here, Napoleon may seem pessimistic about his legacy in that regard and yet at other times found some encouragement.

In 1816, when Napoleon listed his achievements as a reply to an English newspaper article, notice how few relate to the military and how once again he compares his empire’s achievements to those of the Romans:

the great basins of Antwerp and Flushing, which are capable of accommodating whole fleets and of sheltering them when the sea freezes over; the hydraulic installations at Dunkirk, Le Havre, and Nice; the gigantic basin of Cherbourg; the naval installations at Venice; the fine roads from Antwerp to Amsterdam, from Mainz to Metz, from Bordeaux to Bayonne; the carriage roads over the Simplon, Mont-Cenis, and Mont-Genèvre passes and the Corniche road, which open the Alps to access from four sides—this alone represents more than eight hundred million francs. As for the mountain roads, they surpass all Roman monuments in boldness, grandeur, labor, and ingenuity. The roads linking the Pyrenees with the Alps, Parma and La Spezia, Savona with Piedmont; the Pont d’Iéne, Pont d’Austerlitz, and Pont des Arts [three bridges in Paris]; the bridges at Sèvres, Tours, Roanne, Lyons, Turin, Bourdeaux, Rouen; the bridges across the Isère and Durance, etc.; the canal joining the Rhine to the Rhone by way of the Doubs, which links the Dutch ports with the Mediterranean; the Scheldt-Somme canal, linking Amsterdam and Paris; the Rance-Vilaine canal; the Arles canal; the Pavia canal and the Rhine canal; the draining of the swamps of Bourgoin, of the Cotentin peninsula, and of Rochefort; the restoration of most of the churches destroyed in the Revolution and the building of new ones; the creation of numerous industrial establishments to wipe out begging; the enlargement of the Louvre and the construction of public granaries, of the Bank of France, of the Ourcq canal; the municipal water system in Paris; the numerous drains, quays, embellishments, and monuments of that great capital; his labors in embellishing Rome; the revival of the Lyons manufactures; the creation of several hundred cotton-spinning and weaving plants employing several million workers; the accumulation of funds intended for the creation of four hundred beet-sugar

factories...; fifty million francs spent on repairing and embellishing the palaces of the Crown; sixty millions’ worth of furnishings in the Crown’s palaces in France, Holland, Turin, and Rome; sixty millions’ worth of crown diamonds, all bought with Napoleon’s money, including even the “Regent,” which he recovered from the Jews of Berlin, to whom it had been pawned for three millions; the Musée Napoléon [i.e., the Louvre], whose worth is estimated at more than four hundred million francs and which contains nothing but objects legitimate acquired, either by purchase or by virtue of peace treaties...; several millions economized [to constitute a fund] for the encouragement of agriculture, which is the primary wealth of France; the institution of horse races; the introduction of Merino sheep; etc.

All this constitutes a treasure of several billions that will endure for centuries. \footnote{As quoted in Comte Emmanuel de Las Cases, \textit{Mémorial de Sainte Hélène} (Paris: H. L. Delloye, 1840), 29 September 1816.}

Indeed, these are the sorts of achievements of great men that Napoleon most wanted associated with himself.

Such an association has endured into at least the mid-twentieth century. In the 1954 film \textit{Desirée},\footnote{\textit{Desirée}, played by Jean Simmons, replies, “No, only the way you dreamed it.”\footnote{Daniel Taradash, \textit{Desiree} (Livonia: The CBS/FOX Company, 1988).} The questions that the examples from Gance’s film outlined in the chapter on the Republican Napoleon and from the film mentioned above center on the historical reality of whether or not Napoleon ever actually said anything along the lines of what I have} Napoleon, portrayed by none other than Academy Award winner Marlon Brando, explains, “I made war in order to secure peace, not for a year, but for a dozen centuries. I dreamed of a United States of Europe - Frenchmen, Italians, Germans, Poles, Russians, and all the others. One law, one coinage, one people. Was that so rash a dream?”\footnote{Desiree Clary was one of Napoleon’s former lovers. She went on to marry Marshal Bernadotte and become Sweden’s queen. This cinematic version of her life is based on a novel by Annemarie Selinko.}
quoted in the preceding pages.

The idea that he had aimed to create a federated Europe of different nationalities really took hold in his mind at this point as one of the ways in which he deserved to be remembered as “great.” During the lonely years after his disastrous defeat at Waterloo in 1815, Emperor Napoleon I noted that:

There are dispersed in Europe, upwards of 30,000,000 of French, 15,000,000 of Spaniards, 15,000,000 of Italians, and 30,000,000 of Germans; and it was my intention to incorporate these people each into one nation. . . . In this state of things, there would have been some chance of establishing, in every country, a unity of codes, principles, opinions, sentiments, views, and interests. Then, perhaps, by the help of the universal diffusion of knowledge, one might have thought of attempting, in the great European family, the application of the American Congress, or the Amphictyons of Greece. . . . The impulse is given; and I think, that since my fall, and the destruction of my system, no grand equilibrium can possibly be established in Europe, except by the concentration and confederation of the principle nations. The sovereign, who, in the first great conflict, shall sincerely embrace the cause of the people, will find himself at the head of all Europe, and may attempt whatever he pleases.

In the concluding chapter of his biography of Napoleon, Felix Markham incorporates portions of these reflections, which reflects how Napoleon envisioned federal facets for his empire. Markham goes on to quote Napoleon’s even more compelling comment regarding the application of an innovative federal system in predominately monarchical nineteenth century Europe. Markham notes how during another conversation on St. Helena, Napoleon remarked, “Europe thus divided into nationalities freely formed and free internally, peace between States would have become easier: the United States of

843 Napoleon expressed these aspirations to the Comte de Las Cases in regards to his vision for Europe versus the political system established by the Congress of Vienna. Emmanuel-Auguste-Dieudonné de Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte Hélène: Journal of the Private Life and Conversations of the Emperor Napoleon at Saint Helena (London: B. Bensley, 1823), 134, 139.
Europe would become a possibility."\textsuperscript{844}

Throughout his career, Napoleon considered himself the heir to the French Revolution and also a child of the Enlightenment. As such, his heritage of key enlightened universalisms, particularly “the brotherhood of man” and “neo-classicism or pseudoclassicism,”\textsuperscript{845} started “him on his way to greatness” and influenced the evolution of his cult of great men.\textsuperscript{846} In a conversation with Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi (1773-1842) around the time of the abdication at Fontainbleau, Napoleon described himself as “the child of the revolution” who “owed all his greatness to the emancipation of France from its ancient servitude.”\textsuperscript{847} Did Napoleon see himself as the continuation of the Revolution? He denounced the violence of it, comparing the September Massacres and other bloody pages in its history with the Inquisition.\textsuperscript{848} He nevertheless also said the following in a conversation of 1816:

For henceforth nothing can destroy or efface the grand principles of our Revolution. These great and noble truths must remain forever, so inextricably are they linked to our splendor, our monuments, our prodigious deeds. We have drowned its earlier shame in floods of glory. These truths are henceforth immortal. . . . They live on in England, they illuminate America, they are naturalized in France; from this tripod the light will burst upon the world. These truths will rule the world. They will be the creed, the religion, the morality of all nations. And, no matter what has been said, this memorable era will be linked to my person, because, after all, I have carried its torch and consecrated its principles, and because persecution now has made me its Messiah.\textsuperscript{849}

\textsuperscript{844} Regrettably, Markham does not footnote his source. Felix Markham, 257.
\textsuperscript{845} Holtman, 22.
\textsuperscript{846} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{847} As quoted in William Henry Ireland, The Napoleon anecdotes: illustrating the mental energies of the late emperor of France; and the characters and actions of his contemporary statesmen and warriors, Vol. III (London: C. S. Arnold, 1823), 104.
\textsuperscript{849} For the original source of this quotation, see Comte Emmanuel de Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte Hélène (Paris: H. L. Delloye, 1840), 9-10 August 1816.
In another conversation later that same month in 1816 and again reported by Las Cases, Napoleon said, “The cause of the century has been won, the Revolution accomplished. All that remained to be done was reconcile it with those institutions which it had not destroyed. Now, that achievement was my mission....I would have become the ark of the old and the new covenant, the natural mediator between the old and the new order of things.”

Finally Montholon recorded the following deathbed statement from 17 April 1821:

Bertrand doesn’t understand me. He and Lafayette are still exactly as they were in 1791, with their utopias, their English notions, their bills of grievances and States-General. All they see in the Revolution of 1789 is a mere reform of abuses, and they refuse to admit that it constituted, all in itself, a complete social rebirth….I have saved the Revolution, which was on the point of death; I have washed off its crimes, I have held it up to the eyes of Europe resplendent with glory.

When Napoleon mentions men involved with the Revolution, whether it is Lafayette or Necker, it is negative; however, he did on multiple occasions while exiled present himself as the fulfillment of the Revolution and in decidedly religious language.

While Napoleon wanted to be remembered for his institutional accomplishments, rather than explicitly declare he wanted to be remembered for religious toleration, Napoleon presents other more implicit explanations for why he tolerated people of various faiths. In a conversation of 1817, Napoleon explained,

I would believe as firmly in Christ as does Pope Pius VII--if Christianity dated back to the beginning of the world, if it were the universal religion. But when I see the

---

850 For the original source of this quotation, see Comte Emmanuel de Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte Hélène (Paris: H. L. Delloye, 1840), 24 August 1816.

851 For the original source of this quotation, see Marquis Charles Tristan de Montholon, Historire de la captivaté de Ste-Hélène, Volume II (The Hague: Héritiers Doorman, 1846; Brussels: Meline, Cans et Compagnie, 1846), 87-100.
Moslems follow a simpler religion, one better adapted to their way of life than ours- And then, Socrates and Plato would have to be damned: that's what I always used to ask the bishop of Evreux, and he told me no, God would rather perform a miracle in their favor. Do you really believe that God concerns himself with all our actions?\textsuperscript{852}

Here, Napoleon implies his admiration for ancient Greek philosophers Socrates and Plato, while thinking critically about religion. One could see in this remark an explanation for religious toleration in that he himself does not really believe in Christianity, or is at least skeptical. Such a person would reasonably therefore support religious toleration, because after all, not all great men were Christians.

Particularly in his final years, he did his best to emphasize his more diplomatic and peaceful side. All the while he compared and contrasted himself to various historical figures, especially ancient men, who could have a supranational appeal. But he blended the attributes of these heroes and thereby actually presented himself as unifier of Europe in a manner unlike any of the great emperors who reigned before him: “I wished to found a European system, a European Code of Laws, a European judiciary: there would be but one people in Europe.”\textsuperscript{853} Further, in her memoirs, Madame Claire Élisabeth Jeanne Gravier de Vergennes Rémusat confirms that Napoleon pictured to himself the creation of feudal states, believing that he could make them acceptable, and preserve them from the criticism which was beginning to assail ancient institutions, by establishing them on a scale so grand that as our pride would be enlisted, our reason might be silenced. He believed that once again he could exhibit what history has already witnessed, the world subject to a “People-King,” but that royalty was to be represented in his own person. A combination of Eastern and Roman institutions, bearing also some resemblance to the times of Charlemagne, was to transform the sovereigns of Europe into great

\textsuperscript{852} For the original source of this quotation, see Gaspard Gourgaud, \textit{Sainte-Hélène: Journal inédit de 1815 à 1818, Volume I} (Paris: Flammarion, n.d.), 546-47.
\textsuperscript{853} Felix Markham, 257.
feudatories of the French Empire; and perhaps, if the sea had not effectually preserved England from invasion, this gigantic project might have been carried out.

Shortly after, the Emperor laid the foundation-stone of this brain-built edifice. I allude to the union of the Iron Crown with that of France. 854

This is not exactly a federated Europe—rather a return to feudalism. Napoleon, who hoped to influence his image of really having been a great man, prophesied from St. Helena: “The great works and monuments that I have executed, and the code of laws that I have formed, will go down to the most distant ages, and future historians will avenge the wrongs done to me by my contemporaries.” 855 Thus, the Defeated Napoleon wanted his legacy to be that of law-giver, unifier of Europe, finisher of the Revolution, and aggrandizer of Paris rather than solely as conqueror.

Preliminary Conclusions

After Austerlitz, Napoleon had written about himself and his soldiers attaining “immortal glory.” 856 Such a prophecy seems to have been all but fulfilled. Even his contemporaries, such as Giuseppe Zurlo (1759-1828) wrote on “the immortal Emperor Napoleon.” 857 Napoleon and his “immortal” soldiers live on in books, films, songs, and

855 As quoted in Barry Edward O’Meara, Napoleon in exile: or, A voice from St. Helena. The opinions and reflections of Napoleon on the most important events of his life and government, in his own words, Vol. 2 (New York: W. Gowans, 1853), 200.
856 General Michel Franceschi, Austerlitz (Montreal: International Napoleonic Society, 2005), 33.
monuments that are too numerable to list without omission. But this immortality was achieved at a great price. Between 1789 and 1815, France lost “850,000 dead and 550,000 missing.” Several marshals and military heroes interred in the Panthéon are among those figures. Marshals Berthier, Bessières, Brune, Lannes, Murat, Ney, and Poniatowski all died violent deaths, ranging from drowning to gun shot wounds to falling out of a window, by the end of 1815. Lannes had his left leg amputated before his death. One may even add Napoleon to that list of great men who suffered physical tragedies, for his body suffered from a variety of battle wounds, including a gun shot to the foot and a bayonet to the thigh. He was after all, not an armchair general, or a modern president secure far away from the front lines. A student of Alexander and Caesar, Napoleon braved fighting like his heroes of old and for that he has remained a great hero to many.

\footnote{Blond, 514-515.}
Figure 11. Baron Antoine-Jean Gros’s painting depicting a Romanticized revolutionary Napoleon braving Austrian guns by attempting to cross a bridge at Arcola in November 1796.

Nevertheless, the dashing young Napoleon carrying the flag on the bridge at Arcola immortalized in Gros’s painting aged over the next twenty years as the toll of
stress and war wounds added up. Even if great, men are still men. The Napoleon of Leipzig and St. Helena looked very different from the Napoleon of 1796. Mentally, the reflective Defeated Napoleon appears downright depressed on occasion when reminiscing on his life and even when thinking of himself as his great heroes of old. In December 1815, Napoleon thought not of his glorious moments in Italy immortalized in Gros’s painting, but rather when he walked among the carcasses of a battlefield and came upon a dog still licking the hand of his master, protecting his dead body from Napoleon and his comrades in arms, and howling mournfully. Napoleon thought this “man…perhaps, has friends in the camp or in his company; and here he lies forsaken by all except his dog!” The feelings of Napoleon, usually “tearless” and “without emotion” during battles, “were roused by the…dog! I should have been easily moved by a suppliant enemy: I could very well imagine Achilles surrendering up the body of Hector at the sight of Priam’s tears.”

Here on St. Helena, a mostly abandoned and to some extent betrayed Napoleon does not recall the memory of a triumphant Achilles at the moment of glory, but a more humane Achilles after the consequences of his victories have become apparent.

Napoleon’s physical and to some extent mental changes during his later years are so striking that even American college-level biology/medical textbooks may include the occasional reference to this strange occurrence. One book uses figures from the Mansell Collection to compare and contrast a healthy first consul with a pudgy, almost feminine

---

emperor. The Defeated Napoleon is described as fat, with round breasts, smooth skin, small genitals, and silky hair. He is alleged to have adisposogenital dystrophy, a disease of the hypothalamus that in essence alters one’s secondary sex characteristics. Whether or not these claims are those of anti-Napoleon misogynists attempting to disparage Napoleon and women simultaneously by claiming that Napoleon suffered defeat, because he literally started transforming into a female is hard to say with any certainty. That his health declined and that the less than ideal conditions on St. Helena did not help his mental and physical well-being is obvious. During his reign, Napoleon’s quarrel with the pope deteriorated into a situation comparable to the Medieval lay Investiture Controversy between Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII. Nevertheless, even this determined former papal opponent “wrote a letter to King George requesting better treatment” of Napoleon on St. Helena.

In any event, Napoleon did act less decisively in his later years and, much like the meteor he alluded to, he had burned himself out by fighting nearly continuous warfare for roughly two decades amidst undertaking numerous public works projects most of which had historical inspiration and which also honored himself, his ancient heroes, and his great civil and military contemporaries who toiled along with him. With such projects, Napoleon did enlighten many scattered around our globe, but at great cost to himself and many, many others. Near the end of his life, Napoleon continued to present himself as

the ultimate “great man” who honored his also “great” contemporaries. He reminisced on how he “rewarded merit of all sorts” and asked, “what is there that a historian cannot defend?” He concluded that he “aspired to universal monarchy,” because “the fortuitous consequences of circumstance [and] our enemies…gradually led me there,” and that his ambition was perhaps the grandest and most elevated sort ever! That of establishing, consecrating the rule of reason and the full exercise and enjoyment of all human faculties! And here perhaps the historian will find himself reduced to regretting that this ambition was not accomplished and fulfilled!

In his penultimate moments of life, he wrote a note not found until after his death in which he once again presents himself as an ancient hero, but a tragic ancient hero, one who indeed sacrificed much as the metaphorical meteor burns out its flame. Napoleon wrote, “A new Prometheus, I am chained to a rock to be gnawed by a vulture. Yes, I have stolen the fire of Heaven and made a gift of it to France. The fire has returned to its source and I am here.”

Nevertheless, it is telling that in Napoleon’s ultimate moments, his thoughts were not on great men, but of the female love of his life. According to Montholon, on 26 April 1821, the dying Napoleon said, “I have just seen my good Josephine, but she didn’t want to kiss me. She slipped away the moment I wanted to take her in my arms. She was sitting there; it was as if I had last seen her only the night before. She hadn’t changed—always the same, still completely devoted to me. She told me we were going

---


863 Napoleon, “Action and Reaction on the Continent, 1815-21,” History in Quotations: Reflecting
to see each other again and never leave each other. She has promised me—Did you see her?" In the end, the extraordinary Napoleon shared a not so uncommon longing for his deceased wife and his final concerns were not on his legacy but on a reunion with her. His final word on 5 May 1821 was “Joséphine.” The great tragedy that was the final years of this great man’s real life was over, although the legend of Napoleon the Great had only begun.

---


865 As quoted in Felix Markham, 253.
Conclusion

In 1807, Napoleon said the following about History: “Thus acquaintance with and the choice of good historians, reliable memoirs, or true contemporary chronicles form a useful and real branch of knowledge.” As we have seen in the preceding chapters, his interest in history largely focused on the character and exploits of great men and how he too might become “great.” Accordingly, he asked probing questions about the nature of his heroes: “After all, should a great statesman have any feeling? Is he not a completely eccentric personage, standing always alone on his own side, with the world on the other?” At other times, he did not praise, but scrutinized men regarded by his contemporaries as great. In his youth, Napoleon described Rousseau as “that deep and penetrating man,” but in 1803, Napoleon said, “Voltaire is for mature people. Until I was sixteen, I would have fought to the death for Rousseau against all the friends of Voltaire. Today’s it’s the other way around. I am especially disgusted with Rousseau since I have seen the Orient. Savage man is a dog.” That same year, Napoleon also

---


867 See the entry for December 3 in Napoleon Bonaparte, The Napoleon Calendar.


869 For the source of this quotation, see comte Pierre Louis de Roederer, Autour de Bonaparte: Journal du comte P.-L. Roederer, ed. Maurice Vitrac (Paris: Daragon, 1909), 164-65; see also Napoleon
said, “Shakespeare had been forgotten in England for two centuries: Voltaire, who lived in Geneva, and who wished to flatter Englishmen of his acquaintance, praised him, and everybody began to repeat that Shakespeare was the greatest poet in the world."\footnote{Bonaparte, “Conversation, 1803,” \textit{The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words}, ed. J. Christopher Herold (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 155-156.}

Napoleon focused so much time and effort on his cult of great men in part because he believed that his subjects had such expectations of their leaders. He remarked, after all, that “Frenchmen love greatness and admire even the semblance of it.”\footnote{Hubert N. B. Richardson, \textit{A dictionary of Napoleon and his times} (London: Cassell and Company, 1920), 425.} He also told his brother, “What the people of Germany keenly desire is that talented non-nobles have equal rights to your esteem and to employment…”\footnote{For the source of this quotation see the entry for August 22 in Napoleon Bonaparte, \textit{The Napoleon Calendar}.}

In his efforts to promote the idea of greatness, he and his supporters correspondingly included Napoleon as a model of greatness. Josephine’s speech to a family council on the dissolution of her marriage with Napoleon reflects as much. The speech, actually written by Comte Michel-Louis-Étienne Regnaud de Saint-Jean d’Angély (1761-1819), whom Napoleon made councilor of state and a member of l’Académie française along with various other honors, includes the description of Napoleon as “a great man plainly raised up by Providence to remove the ill effects of a terrible Revolution, and to set up again the altar, the throne, and the social order. But the dissolution of my marriage will make no change in the sentiments of my heart.”\footnote{Napoleon Bonaparte, “Letter to Jérôme Bonaparte, King of Westphalia, November 15, 1807,” \textit{Napoleon: Symbol for an Age, A Brief History with Documents}, ed. Rafe Blaufarb (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008), 144.}
Notice here that what is presented as great about Napoleon is not his military victories but rather his role as pacifier of revolutionary turmoil and social chaos.

In this dissertation, I focused on the ideas of the great men who shaped that constantly evolving vision and Napoleon’s contemporaries whom Napoleon hoped would help him achieve it. But Napoleon also became a member of the cult of great men and his depictions as a great man changed over time and for different audiences, just as Napoleon’s cult of great men changed during his various phases. Napoleon in effect manipulated what Bonnet argues was a subversive cult of “great men” and lui-même joined their ranks.

In the first instance, he used the cult of “great men” as a means of inspiring his subjects and winning their support. The many monuments erected to honor “great men” served as visual inspirational reminders of their achievements and what others could aspire to achieve, whether they be statues of such European heroes as Charlemagne or more French specific heroes as Joan of Arc and Desaix in public settings or statues of Cicero, Fox, Hampden, Lord Chathan, Nelson, and Washington used to inspire Napoleon and guests to his residence. The possibility of receiving the marshal’s baton or Legion of Honor medal encouraged his subjects, whether military or civilian, to work for such personal commendations, while at the same time benefiting their empire. In the second instance, by presenting himself as a military hero and a universal monarch, Napoleon began to engineer a semi-legendary version of his career that put himself on the same level of the greatest of history’s conquerors: Alexander, Caesar, Constantine, and

Letters Written by Napoleon from St. Helena to Lady Clavering, and a Reply by Theodore Hook; with
Charlemagne. This version of his career took root with both contemporaries and later historians. His contemporary David compared Napoleon’s physical appearance to that of ancient heroes.\textsuperscript{874} And the later historian Georges Lefebvre acknowledges Emile Bourgeois’s belief that Napoleon dreamed of heading to Constantinople or India and Edouard Driault’s discussion of how Napoleon compared “himself to Charlemagne and to Caesar.”\textsuperscript{875}

**Napoleon’s Reception as a French Hero**

Napoleon described “Man, and above all the historian,” as “full of vanity. He gives fine scope to his imagination, and tries to interest the reader at the expense of truth.”\textsuperscript{876} Napoleon did just about all he could to write his own version of his history in a vain and imaginative manner comparable to that undertaken by many a great man he admired. By 1806, engravings appeared designating Napoleon as “le Grand.”\textsuperscript{877} As such, the cult of “great men” did not undermine Napoleon’s reign by allowing for the potentially negative contrasts one might draw between “great men” of the past and contemporary leaders. In the eighteenth century leading up to and during the French Revolution, Frenchmen could contrast the examples of Louis XV and Louis XVI with far greater leaders of times past.

---


\textsuperscript{875} Geyl, 437.


\textsuperscript{877} Markham, *Napoleon for Dummies*, 321.
or even civilians of more meager means who nevertheless toiled for their state if not humanity in general. Napoleon’s use of the cult of “great men,” including his policies of rewarding individuals based on merit, as well as his numerous accomplishments as general, law-giver, and statesman, made such unfavorable contrasts less likely. As early as soon after the first Italian campaign, Napoleon was received in France as a “great man.” In his memoirs, General J. F. Boulart described the scene in Avignon by noting how at “the sight of the great man, the air echoed with acclamations and shouts of ‘Vive Bonaparte!’ and this crowd, and that shout, accompanied him right up to the hotel where he put up. It was an electrifying scene.”878 Another supporter claimed Napoleon “filled the entire world with the sound of his arms and brilliance of his victories.”879 General Jean Rapp (1771-1821) “saw Napoleon as an instrument of divine justice, and it was reported that some of his followers greeted each other with the words, ‘Praise God and his son Bonaparte,’”880 especially true as long as he was winning.

It is certain that, to an extent, Napoleon’s memoirs of St. Helena succeeded in perpetuating a notion of Napoleon’s greatness, at least in France in the decades after Napoleon Bonaparte’s death. In addition to the Bible and more than the Bible, Napoleon’s St. Helena memoirs gave purpose to the character of Julien created by Stendhal in his Le Rouge et le Noir (1830). No matter what decision he found himself

---

obliged to make, Julien never failed to ask himself what Napoleon would have done.

Stendhal called Napoleon “the finest man to have appeared since Caesar, whom in our eyes he would appear to have surpassed.”881 In The Charterhouse of Parma (1839), Stendhal, who had served in Napoleon’s army, also wrote:

‘On 15 May 1796, General Bonaparte made his entry into Milan at the head of that youthful army which but a short time before had crossed the Bridge of Lodi and taught the world that after so many centuries Caesar and Alexander had a successor.’882

In nineteenth century literature, Napoleon served as a model of someone “acquainted with the human mind” who “took good care that the meanest of his soldiers should see in perspective the possibility of grasping a marshal’s baton.”883 Accordingly, François-René de Chateaubriand called Napoleon “the mightiest breath of life which ever animated human clay” and Talleyrand regarded Napoleon as “the most extraordinary man that has lived for many centuries.”884 To Chateaubriand, Napoleon was “the strong man who has saved us from the abyss.”885

In France, the conflation of the memory of the Revolution and the Napoleonic episode is already apparent among the motivations of those who manned the barricades in 1830, at least as articulated by them, as it is on the occasion of the transfer of Napoleon’s remains from St. Helena to Paris in 1840. Similarly, for King Louis-Philippe of France, Napoleon was “the great regenerator of France.” Such a designation appeared on

---

881 Stendhal, A Life of Napoleon as quoted in Markham, Napoleon for Dummies, 9.
882 Markham, Napoleon’s Road to Glory: Triumphs, Defeats, & Immortality, 102-103.
884 Ibid., 212.
885 R. Po-chia Hsia, Lynn Hunt, Thomas Martin, Barbara H. Rosenwein, and Bonnie G. Smith,
medallions minted in 1833 to commemorate the restoration of Napoleon’s statue on top of the Vendôme Column in Paris that Napoleon had modeled on Trajan’s Column in Rome. For Louis-Philippe, Napoleon would be recognized as a great military hero, rather than emperor. He is shown in his military uniform on the medallion and column and was later entombed in the famous former military hospital known as Les Invalides.

Figure 12. Scan I made of the front of my French medallion from 28 July 1833 depicting the statue of Napoleon in his military uniform on top of the Vendôme Column.

Observers saw something else in the French reception to the monument depicted on the medallion. In 1832, Heinrich Heine noted:

The French love the dead Napoleon more than the living Lafayette. To the French Napoleon is a magic word that electrifies and dazzles them. A thousand cannon sleep within that name as they do in the Vendôme Column, and the Tuileries will tremble if one day those cannon awake.\(^{886}\)

The erection of the monument and distribution of the medallion anticipated Napoleon’s reburial in Paris in 1840, where according to Victor Hugo Napoleon seemed surrounded by representations of the great men he admired. Napoleon’s coffined remains had arrived on a deck at Cherbourg adorned symbolically with “wreaths of

immortelles.”

Hugo describes how the coach halted and “remained motionless for several minutes between the statues of Joan of Arc and Charles V” and how other decorations prepared for the festivities included “a figurine of Charlemagne,” a “grand imperial crown similar to Charlemagne’s,” “the diadem of the golden laurel leaves similar to Caesar’s,” and “the angel of judgment blowing his trumpet upon sleeping St. Jerome.”

During World War I, General Noël Marie Joseph Édouard de Curières de Castelnau (1851-1944) remarked, “Ah, Napoleon, Napoleon. If he were here now, he’d have thought of something else.”

In 1924, Elie Faure “described Napoleon as ‘one of the greatest heroes of intellect’.”

Twentieth-century French historian Jean Tulard wrote the following about the cultural influence and persistence of the Napoleonic legend:

Beethoven removed his dedication to Napoleon from his Third Symphony, but Berlioz composed a cantata in 1835 on Le Cinq Mai; in 1943 Schoenberg was to write an Ode to Napoleon in which Napoleon was to be likened to Hitler, but to Robert Schumann we owe The Two Grenadiers with words from the poem by Heine; Tchaikovsky branded 1812 with his 1812 Overture, but Prokofiev is more balanced in his opera War and Peace. More films have been made about Napoleon than about Joan of Arc, Abraham Lincoln and Lenin combined. He has been the subject or the target of each and every nationalism: Austrian (The Young Médard by Curtiz), German (Grune’s Waterloo and Wenzler’s The Hundred Days around 1930), English (The Iron Duke or Lady Hamilton), Nazi (Kolberg made in 1844 by Harlan on instructions from Goebbels), Stalinist (Kutuzov in 1943), Polish (Vajda’s Ashes in 1968) and of course, French with Gance and Guitry.

887 Recall that his imperial guard was nicknamed the “immortals.” Blond, 504.
Neither has he been overlooked by Hollywood directors (Ford, Walsh, Vidor, Sidney and Mann). He has been used in the period of the “détente” (Waterloo, shot in Russia in 1970 by a Russian, Bondartchouk, for an Italian director with Orson Welles as Louis XVIII) and in pornography (L’Auberge des plaisirs, on the Emperor’s alleged impotence).

Chaplin thought of interpreting Napoleon as a character who had become a myth of the cinema, like Arsène Lupin, Garbo (who played Marie Walewska), Mickey Mouse or Laurel and Hardy. Caran d’Ache used him in his comic strip at the Pieds Nickelés, and he even features in science fiction (Le voyageur imprudent).  

While all this attention may not equal admiration, it does reflect recognition of Napoleon as an extraordinary man.

Napoleon’s Reception as a European Hero

Indeed, even non-Frenchmen from countries hostile to Napoleon at various points during his reign recognized his achievements. Napoleon believed that in “order to do something great, one must have either faithful friends or bitter enemies.” In his life, he probably had more bitter enemies than friends who remained faithful. Nevertheless, such were his efforts of joining the cult of great men by undertaking numerous great projects that although plenty of people have reviled Napoleon throughout the past two centuries, an actual cult of Napoleon developed and has persisted as well.

Germans of varying faiths identified Napoleon as a new Frederick the Great or

---

892 For the source of this quotation see the entry for August 23 in Napoleon Bonaparte, The Napoleon Calendar: A Quotation from the Works and Sayings of Napoleon for Every Day in the Year compiled by Dr. A. S. Rappoport, ed. John McErlean (Mississauga: Poniard Publishing, 1996).
893 Multiple international Napoleonic organizations currently exist with thousands of members.
even a new Julius Caesar. After Napoleon’s entrance into Berlin, a Berliner wrote, “I saw at close range the successor of Frederick the Great.”  Heine’s “adolescent crush on the great man,” as M. J. Cohen and John Major describe it, shares the hyperbolic comparison with Julius Caesar made so often by Napoleon. In *Englische Fragmente* (English Jottings), Heine reminisces:

> For ever I see him high on horseback, the eternal eyes set in the marble of that imperial visage, looking on with the calm of destiny at his Guards as they march past. He was sending them to Russia, and the old grenadiers glanced up at him with so awesome a devotion, so sympathetic an earnestness, with the pride of death: *Te, Caesar, morituri saluting* [Caesar, they who are about to die salute you].

Another great German writer Goethe, enormously flattered by Napoleon, in a letter to Knebel on January 3, 1807, referred similarly to the French emperor as “the most extraordinary phenomenon history could have produced since Caesar.” The image of Napoleon as a Caesar, or a Roman emperor, is one that even today greets many a visitor to Paris.

Figure 14. Photographs of Napoleon as sculpted on the Arc de Triomphe de l’Etoile worldwide.

894 Blond, 105.
896 Interestingly enough, Goethe still revered Napoleon as late as the War of Liberation in 1813, despite criticism from other Germans. Durant, 623; Ellis, 203.
(left) and in Les Invalides (center and right) taken by Matthew Zarzeczny in Paris in May 2001.

Still such was Napoleon’s legend that he became more to people than a mortal emperor. Napoleon’s ambassador to Austria allegedly once told Napoleon, “Sire, some say you are a god, others, that you are a devil, but everyone allows you are more than a man.” Napoleon’s German contemporary Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel praised Napoleon as “that world soul . . . reaching across the world and ruling it . . . whom it is impossible not to admire.”

Such was Napoleon’s legacy that Victoria, queen of the United Kingdom of Napoleon’s greatest rival, “ordered her son, the later Edward VII, to ‘kneel down before the tomb of the great Napoleon.’” And Winston Churchill expressed disgust at any comparison between Napoleon and the great butcher of Jews Adolf Hitler. Churchill “would not desecrate” St. Helena “by putting Nazis on it.” Thus, for accomplished British and Germans alike, Napoleon was more than simply a French conqueror. Rather his perceived greatness placed him among humanity’s immortals.

Napoleon’s Reception as a Jewish Hero

---

898 Durant, 647.
899 Holtman, 211.
And, after all, during Napoleon first Italian campaign Jews began to welcome Napoleon “by virtue of a Hebrew translation of his” last or family “name as helek tov, i.e., ‘Good Portion,’ thus being made a figure of almost Messianic qualities. . . . The ‘helek tov’ became in the eyes of the Italian Jews the ohev Israel, ‘Lover of Israel.’”

In the official Transactions of the Parisian Sanhedrim or Acts of the Assembly of Israelitish Deputies of France and Italy Convoked at Paris by an Imperial and Royal Decree Dated May 30, 1806, Baruch Cerf-Berr proclaims:

It is under the auspicious protection of Napoleon the Great, of that hero whom Providence has sent his mercy to regenerate the French Empire--that hero, equally wonderful by his profound genius and by his promptitude in execution, and who was destined to fix irrevocably the fate of Europe . . .

. . . His Majesty has been pleased not only to make us forget hardships which degrade mankind, but also to put us in full enjoyment of all the rights of French citizens: his wish is to unite us more closely with the greatest nation on earth, so as to form but one people.  

Molé described the Napoleonic “project” to call a new Sanhedrin as “one of the most beautiful designs ever conceived for the good of humanity.” In that statement, we again see not only the practically hyperbolic praise from one of Napoleon’s supporters that the great man encouraged, but also the universalism that frequently appears in Napoleonic hero worship. Napoleon’s polices are not presented as being just for the good of Jews or the good of Frenchmen. Rather, they are allegedly designed for the “the

---

2002), 352.
good of humanity.’’

Seeing an almost hyperbolic positive side to Napoleon’s policies based on what he believed his great heroes had done and attempted before him, Jewish Germans and Frenchmen generally told a positive story about the Napoleonic legacy. In 1806, Baruch Cerf-Berr referred to Napoleon as “Napoleon the Great . . . that hero whom Providence has sent his mercy to regenerate the French Empire--that hero, equally wonderful by his profound genius and by his promptitude in execution, and who was destined to fix irrevocably the fate of Europe . . .” This extreme enthusiasm did not go unnoticed outside of France. On September 24, 1806, Metternich wrote to Count Stadion that “‘the Israelites of all lands are looking toward this Messiah [Napoleon] who seems to be freeing them from the yokes under which they find themselves . . . to prove to every nation that its true homeland is France.’’’

Franz Kobler notes how “Theodor Herzl, in a great moment of his struggle for the realization of the Zionist idea, referred to Napoleon as his precursor” and “was attracted by the great emancipator, the organizer and legislator of Europe.” Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) “saw in him the ‘Moses of the French’” and as a result of Heine’s efforts, “Napoleon the Emancipator, the unifier of Europe, more than any other vision of the Corsican, seized the imagination of generations of Jews.”

---

904 Kobler, 152.
906 Maslin, 15.
907 Kobler, 10, 202.
908 Ibid., 184-185.
Final Conclusions

We can easily conclude that Napoleon failed in most of his projects, because he ultimately suffered catastrophic military defeat and eventual exile, but his role in continuing and entering the cult of great men appears far more successful. Thus, as Napoleon hoped, he joined the Cult of Great Men and became a hero for people who lived even centuries after his death. Yet, Napoleon like most if not all, great men was still flawed. Accordingly, for Napoleonic scholar David Chandler, Napoleon was a “great, bad man.” Indeed, one may be great in one or more aspects, but nevertheless have other characteristics that should not be praised. After all, a moral man could not look upon all of Alexander, Caesar, and Napoleon’s romantic and sexual relations as models to follow. Of course, perhaps it is these flaws that make them great men, i.e. people whose actions and motivations as fellow humans we may understand and whose footsteps we may realistically be able to follow, rather than gods whom no man can really truly know or whose power men cannot possess. And although we may come across the occasional remark from a Napoleonic ally who refers to Napoleon as “today’s Jupiter,” or an admirer like Clausewitz who called Napoleon “the god of war,” it is

---

911 Blond, 227.
912 Frederick W. Kagan, *Napoleon and Europe, Volume I: The End of the Old Order, 1801-1805*
more often a “great man” than a deity that Napoleon compares himself to and far more typically are they “great men” that he honors and promotes throughout his career than gods of any kind.

Yet, for King Zaide in Senegal in 1816, such was Napoleon’s achievement of moving from general to emperor that it could scarcely be believed. Alexander Correard and J.-B. Henry Savigny, two survivors of the notorious raft of the Medusa fiasco, record how Zaide called the Ex-Emperor, sometimes Buonaparte, and sometimes Napoleon, a Marabou, at the name of Buonaparte, interrupted him, and asked if he was the general whose armies he had seen in Upper Egypt, when he was going on his pilgrimage to Mecca, to which Mr. Kummer answering in the affirmative, the king and his suite were delighted; they could not conceive how a mere general of army had been able to raise himself to the rank of Emperor: it seems that these people had, till then, believed that Napoleon and Buonaparte were two different persons.913

The supposed incredibleness of Napoleon’s career is indeed a trait found with the careers of many great men. The sources in which Napoleon read about Alexander and Caesar were written either long after Alexander’s death or about a polarizing figure like Caesar. Thus, what Napoleon, and even we scholars in the twenty-first century, “knew” about these individuals may suffer from many factual distortions and errors, partially resulting from the ancient men’s own efforts at self-propaganda. Thus, Napoleon’s impression of ancient heroes was largely an idealized one.


Having synthesized other scholarly work and analyzed Napoleon’s use of political, cultural, and religious “great men” from a variety of nationalities during the first imperial period in French history, I cannot at the end of this dissertation ignore the ultimate impact of Napoleon’s use of the cult of great men on French and European history. I have demonstrated how this manipulation of the cult of great men by an emperor influenced a broad spectrum of policies that affected practically all aspects of his subjects’ lives and consequently have left a long-enduring and uneven legacy throughout Europe and beyond. In France, Napoleon’s legacy signifies the unsuccessful reconciling or perhaps synthesizing of the heritage of the French Revolution with the predominant traditions of Roman Catholicism. Additionally, while even during his reign, evidence exists of Napoleon wishing for churches to be named “St. Napoleon,” the virtual deification of Napoleon as something more than a man persisted after his downfall, exemplified by a movement of French Catholics in the early twentieth century around the time of the start of World War I to canonize Napoleon. This movement gained support over time and promised to be an event that “would achieve absolutely that union of patriotic and religious sentimentality to which the Church in France directs its activities.”

Efforts to canonize Napoleon long after his reign suggest that he succeeded in at least creating a legacy that reflects his salutary actions towards religious groups.

Nevertheless, for the territories temporarily conquered by Napoleon the First Empire’s impact on their subsequent religious history has created rather different legacies.

---

for each region.\textsuperscript{915} In the Papal States, the pope reclaimed his former temporal powers that Napoleon had removed.\textsuperscript{916} Soon after Napoleon’s fall from power, Rome also turned its attention to the goal of establishing a new network of dioceses in central and western Europe to be distributed among the various states that had materialized in the wake of the Napoleonic era, although state governments remained ambivalent towards the Catholic church’s project.\textsuperscript{917} In many ways, the Protestant nationalism that followed the battles of Leipzig and Waterloo persisted and culminated in the creation of a Protestant-led German Empire that ultimately humbled the once mighty French state and replaced the French Empire as the predominant Western European Empire.\textsuperscript{918} The Napoleonic aftermath of the French Revolution clearly serves as the benchmark of crisis for the early nineteenth century in Germany.\textsuperscript{919} Furthermore, the wars against Napoleon continued a popular belief in the German national mission that originated during the Reformation, with ceremonies becoming the popular expression of the demands for unity and freedom after his defeat.\textsuperscript{920} The war against Napoleon had thus led to calls for a renaissance in German culture and language that appealed to the traditions established by the Reformation and led to years of optimism before the failed revolution in Germany of 1848.\textsuperscript{921} Similarly, in the Catholic regions of Germany, nineteenth century historians usually focused on Napoleon’s role as a mere conqueror, but unlike their Protestant German neighbors who

\textsuperscript{915} Rémond, 86.
\textsuperscript{916} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{917} Herzog, 22-23.
\textsuperscript{918} Cramer, 101.
\textsuperscript{919} Herzog, 21.
\textsuperscript{920} Cramer, 99-101.
ascribed to a cult of Gustavus Adolphus in opposition to the cult of Napoleon, these Catholic Germans also described Protestant hero Gustavus Adolphus in the same unflattering terms as they did Napoleon.\(^{922}\)

By considering the influences of great Macedonians, Romans, Carolingians, Germans, Italians, French, and Americans, one discovers that Napoleon did not seek to exclusively recreate any one previously existing and nationally specific cult of great men, but rather synthesized elements of all of these influences into an broad and universal cult of great men in order to unite the diverse peoples who lived under the auspices of the Grand Empire. Bringing together various historic influences to formulate an ideal political system with foundations based on Napoleon’s predecessors, Napoleon also sought to exploit cultural, religious, and societal similarities among his peoples and to bridge cultural, religious, and societal differences that caused strife among them. The religious differences created by the Reformation were among the divisions that Napoleon wanted to overcome in his empire. Therefore, Napoleon did not only cite the example of great generals or great politicians; he also looked to the Constantines of history to present himself and his collaborators as religious “uniters.” Depending on the circumstances, the Napoleonic cult of great men could thus appeal and offer recognition to soldiers or citizens, Christians or Jews. Napoleon may have conceived of this part of his larger, evolving dream of European if not world empire early on in his political career, perhaps even after his return from Egypt and, \(^{923}\) as I have explained in the preceding chapters, he

---

\(^{922}\) Cramer, 111-112.

\(^{923}\) See Philip G. Dwyer, “Napoleon and the Drive for Glory: Reflections on the Making of French
understood his “enlightening” vision to encompass great men from practically or nearly all facets of European history—a lesson perhaps not completely lost on later would-be conquerors or unifiers of Europe and beyond.\textsuperscript{924}

Louis Napoleon (or Napoleon III) appropriated and further propagated this self-estimation, both in propaganda and in action, because that is what \textit{Les idées napoloniennes} is in part about. After all, Napoleon III continued to make new marshals, to award the legion of honor, fight to reestablish an Italian kingdom, and to renovate Paris. Napoleon I may have believed himself to be one meteor who enlightened the earth for a short time before burning out, but no one could reasonably argue that he was the last.

While on Elba in 1814, Napoleon recounted a discussion he had with Tsar Alexander in 1807 in which Napoleon opined that a “Caesar, an Alexander may not be found once in an age…”\textsuperscript{925} When everything is said and done, perhaps even in spite of himself, Napoleon went most successfully down in memory as a military phenomenon, or as the kind of meteor or a comet that lights up the sky only once or so in every couple of hundred years.

---

\textsuperscript{924} Hubert Vedrine said, “The United States became what France wanted to be, the universal country.” Hubert Vedrine as quoted in John Vinocur, “Criticism of U.S. obscures growing disunity on Continent,” \textit{The International Herald Tribune} (Tuesday, January 20, 2004): 2.

According to Napoleon, “Really talented and careful historians will write history with official documents.”

In accordance with this maxim, the arguments presented in this dissertation have been based on primary source quotations and comes from Napoleon as well as his administrators, soldiers, and diplomatic rivals. The primary evidence contains much information about Napoleon’s efforts to link himself to some occasions a national figure such as Duguesclin and Philip the Fair, but more often to universal ones such as Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar.

We know what sources Napoleon read and at what points in his career, because Napoleon mentions specific works and kept track of the volumes that comprised his evolving library. During the Austerlitz campaign, Napoleon exclaimed, “Look at Corneille, what depth of creativity! There was a statesman!” In 1808, Napoleon decided to assemble a portable library for his use that would include Greek epics, “under the head of history Machiavelli’s *Discours sur Tite-Live*, the *Esprits des Lois*, the *Grandeur des Romains*, and whatever is worth keeping of Voltaire’s historical

---

926 Napoleon Bonaparte as quoted in Holtman, 175.
928 As J. Christopher Herold points out in *The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words*, Napoleon, while in exile in 1816, practically plagiarized Machiavelli’s *Discourses I.XII*. See Bonaparte, *The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words*, 53.
writings,” and the memoirs of Roman leaders who campaigned against the Parthians. In 1808, Napoleon envisioned this portable library as consisting of one thousand volumes, but one year later in 1809, he decided that the number of volumes should be expanded to three thousand in order to include additional works by Strabo and many others. In 1810, Napoleon removed “the entire Vatican archives (hundreds of wagon-loads!) to Paris” and planned to publish “the Vatican file of the Galilean trial proceedings” between 1810 and 1814. During the retreat from Russia in 1812, Napoleon le Grand and his Grande Armée abandoned “editions of Voltaire, J-J. Rousseau and Buffon’s Natural History, bound in morocco leather and gilt edged.” Napoleon left “an annotated copy of The Prince . . . in his carriage at Waterloo.” While on St. Helena, Napoleon read a translation of Hume. This evidence that is exploited in the four chapters of this dissertation proves historical change in Napoleon’s ideas and use of

---

929 Bonaparte, Napoleon Self-Revealed in Three Hundred Selected Letters, 223-224.
932 Sergeant Bourgogne as quoted in Blond, 348.
933 See Bonaparte, The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words, 6. Moreover, in Madame de Staël’s chapter on “la doctrine politique de Bonaparte” in her Considérations sur la Révolution française, she discusses how Napoleon studied The Prince for various reasons, but especially in order to understand “l’art de tromper les hommes” (“the art of misleading men”). See Anne-Louise-Germaine de Staël, Considérations sur la Révolution française (Paris: Tallandier, 1983), 422. Validating Madame de Staël’s rather derisive interpretation of Napoleon’s use of Machiavelli’s work, Napoleon’s first Minister of Police, Joseph Fouché, explained how a “Machiavellian maxim” was used to set up Napoleon’s somewhat notorious police network. Michael Sibalis, “The Napoleonic Police State” in Napoleon and Europe (New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), edited by Philip G. Dyer, 84. Equally revealing, early twentieth century Londoner Dr. A.S. Rappoport discovered that Napoleon asserted that “A congress is a fable agreed upon by politicians. It is the pen of Machiavelli united to the sword of Mohammed.” From the entry for July 26 of The Napoleon Calendar.
934 Napoleon Bonaparte, Napoleon’s Notes on English History made on the Eve of the French Revolution, illustrated from Contemporary Historians and referenced from the findings of Later Research
his cult of great men, including his ideas on and use of specific individuals.

Because Napoleon and those who knew him intimately left written records of his thoughts on and inspiration from the large body of works that he read about “great men,” we can apply the above analysis to a number of additional key members of the Napoleonic cult of great men. In his letters, including “new” material not examined before by other historians, he uses the terms “brave,” “universal,” and “great” and describes how he perceives himself in relation to ancient and medieval emperors. On many occasions he praises these figures with seemingly unrestrained hyperbole and yet on others he offers more subdued, cynical observations of their paths to greatness. For example, he explained how

Shakespeare had been forgotten in England for two centuries: Voltaire, who lived in Geneva, and who wished to flatter Englishmen of his acquaintance, praised him, and everybody began to repeat that Shakespeare was the greatest poet in the world.

Such commentary provides useful insight into how Napoleon thought about great men and fortunately such comments are numerous throughout the great volume of Napoleon’s writings.

Napoleon’s correspondence, treaties, decrees, and various other primary sources that reveal relevant information has been collected, edited, and published numerous times

---

936 Something that might be counterevidence, but could be interesting is Bonaparte no universal monarch, and not proved to be favourably noticed in prophecy [microform] (Boston: Hastings, Etheridge and Bliss, 1809) with the caption title: “The pretensions of Bonaparte the French Emperor, considered.” The title of this document seems to react to the claims of others that Napoleon was a universal monarch favorably noticed in prophecy.
937 See the entry for July 24 of Napoleon Bonaparte, The Napoleon Calendar.
over the last two centuries. They can be easily accessed in North American libraries, through my contacts with various international Napoleonic authors and historians, in my ever expanding personal collection of Napoleonic literature, and even on reputable websites. Some of the published collections of Napoleon’s “written and spoken words” provide helpful indexes of relevant letters and quotations. In *The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words* (1961), J. Christopher Herold includes such specific sections as “Great Men of Antiquity.” This volume is, however, only a collection of quotations and not an analysis of them. Some “new” primary sources were not available to some of the authors of masterworks written at various times in the nineteenth century and described in Pieter Geyl’s *Napoleon For and Against* (1949). Napoleon’s correspondence did not see publication until late during the reign of Napoleon III. Moreover, Napoleon III did not publish all of Napoleon’s letters. Also, although many of the articles that appear in the member’s bulletins of various Napoleonic organizations tend to be popular history written by non-professional historians, periodically these gazettes publish news about recent discoveries of some obscure primary document that could be useful. Moreover, Editor Douglas Allan recently responded to criticisms of groups like The Napoleonic Society of America “being a Napoleonic adoration society” by asserting, “It is not, and it is our mission to report history in its unvarnished, controversial reality.”938 Finally, other writers of the Napoleonic period have only in the twenty-first century collected and published primary sources that offer “new” insights into Napoleon or that were not previously available.

---

938 Napoleon Bonaparte, “Some Letters from Napoleon,” *Napoleonic Society of America*
David Markham, for example, has followed up on his publication of all of the bulletins of Napoleon’s *Grande Armée* (a work published only in 2006 that actually includes more documents than just the bulletins, such as the text of treaties and articles from Napoleon’s official newspaper) by publishing the previously *unpublished* St. Helena journal of Dr. James Verling, one of Napoleon’s physicians.\(^939\)

Recent work concerning Napoleon’s presentation of himself in the manner of an ancient emperor, the kind of great man with universal pretensions he emphasized during his imperial phase, is limited to such chapter-length essays as Valerie Huet’s “Napoleon I: a new Augustus?” in *Roman presences: receptions of Rome in European culture, 1789-1945* (1999). Although Huet, relying largely on interpretations of visual evidence, argues that Napoleon perceived of himself as not just any emperor but as a new Augustus, another historian dwells on Napoleon’s concentration on Julius Caesar as a model leader to emulate. In “Crossing the Rubicon into Paris: Caesarian Comparisons from Napoleon to de Gaulle” in Maria Wyke’s edited volume on *Julius Caesar in Western Culture* (2006), Oliver Benjamin Hemmerle “illustrates how Napoleon used Caesar as an example for his own political career and the influence of Caesar throughout 19th century France.”\(^940\)

**Primary Works**

*Member’s Bulletin* 82 (Summer/Fall, 2006): 14.

\(^939\) J. David Markham, *Imperial Glory: The Bulletins of Napoleon’s Grande Armée, 1805-1814* (Greenhill Books, 2003); J. David Markham, *Napoleon and Doctor Verling on St Helena* (Pen and Sword, 2006).


______. *Correspondence de Napoléon I, xvii*. Paris: H. Plon, 1858-70.

______. “Decree Regulating the Purpose of the Churches of Saint Denis and Saint Geneviève, February 20, 1806.” *A Documentary Survey of Napoleonic France: A Supplement*. Edited by Eric A. Arnold. New York: University Press of America,


________. “Some Letters from Napoleon,” *Napoleonic Society of America Member’s Bulletin* 82 (Summer/Fall, 2006): 14.


________. *The Table Talk And Opinions Of Napoleon Buonaparte*. London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1868.


de Staël, Anne-Louise-Germaine. *Considérations sur la Révolution française*. Paris:
Tallandier, 1983.


Lactantius. “Here Begins the Book of Lucius Caecilius to Danatus the Confessor on the Deaths of the Persecutors,” De Mortibus Persecutorum. 6-79.


______. *Ueber die Europäische Republik.* Frankfort am Main: Varrentrapp und Wenner, 1787.


Secondary Works


Allan, Douglas. “Once a Millennium—Napoleon the Man,” *Napoleonic Society of America Member’s Bulletin* 82 (Summer/Fall, 2006): 22-23.


Damamme, Jean-Claude. Sorry, Gentlemen, but Napoleon was indeed a Victim of poisoning by Rat Poison. Montreal: The International Napoleonic Society, 2005.


2007).


Hicks, Peter. “Why did the battle of Jena take place?” *Napoleonic Society of America Member’s Bulletin* 82 (Summer/Fall 2006): 6-12.


Horne, Alistair. “Ruler of the World: Napoleon’s Missed Opportunities” in *What if?:*


Mahapatra, Ramswamy. “A Lover of Peace, Made the Aggressor=Thy Name is Napoleon,” *Napoleonic Society of America Member’s Bulletin* 82 (Summer/Fall, 2006): 15-16.


Opfell, Olga S. *Royalty Who Wait: The 21 Heads of Formerly Regnant Houses of


“Tom Bartlett—Obituary,” *Napoleonic Society of America Member’s Bulletin* 82 (Summer/Fall, 2006): 35.


Van Horn Melton, James. “Pietism, Politics, and the Public Sphere in Germany,”


