

2015

Political Conspiracy in Napoleonic France

Kelly Diane Jernigan

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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POLITICAL CONSPIRACY IN NAPOLEONIC FRANCE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

Kelly D. Jernigan

B.A., Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2002

M.A., Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 2007

May 2015

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research and writing that went into this dissertation may have been my own personal projects, but throughout the process, I recognized that I had a whole team of people working alongside me. Without them, I never would have pushed myself so hard and I probably would not have finished my degree. I will be eternally grateful for their support.

To start, I want to recognize the contributions of my two-year-old daughter Mileena. I will always remember you sitting with me so you could “help Mommy work.” When you took over my laptop, you never deleted any chapters, for which I am grateful. I will admit, however, to deleting your additions to my work. Your conclusion that j;lk348kjndf was responsible for the downfall of 803it3-odfkmkd was sheer brilliance, but I do not believe academia is ready for that kind of insight. As for your additions to my notebooks, I kept those. Whenever I ran across your drawings of waterfalls, or the pictures you had me draw (trains, cows, and snowmen were among your most frequent requests), I remembered why I needed to finish this project. I want to give you the world, and while I will fall short of this, I will always do everything I can to give you the best life possible. This dissertation and this degree is a step.

I also want to thank my husband, Mike, for his constant support through the eight years that this project took to complete. Thank you for talking me back from the edge when I threatened to quit—though I maintain I didn’t actually mean it . . . for the most part. Thank you for only occasionally harassing me about “abandoning you and Mileena” when I left the house to get work done. Thank you for listening to my “dry and pedantic” ramblings about all things Napoleonic. Thank you for offering to read my dissertation, even though I know you’d probably rather have a root canal. Now that this is done—and your school too (congratulations!)—our daily lives are going to change a good deal. Work will take the place of school on a full-time basis now. We won’t have the excuse of theses and dissertations to explain the mountain of

clothes that needs to be put away or to justify eating out for nearly every meal of every day. But I look at it this way: if we can survive both of us being in grad school while raising a toddler, we can survive anything. I look forward to seeing what else we can accomplish (overcome?) together.

I want to thank my parents, Glen and Annice Whittaker, for their support for the past 34 years. Thanks for not losing your minds when I told you I wanted to major in two Liberal Arts fields and for not laughing when my hard work then got me a job at a local call center. Thanks for helping move me to Baton Rouge in the August heat. Thanks for driving down to visit and to bring me home for breaks. Thanks for helping move me—and my dozens of extremely heavy boxes of books—back up to Virginia in the August heat. Thanks for buying the first copy of my published Master’s thesis for the absolutely ridiculous price they charged. Thanks for having me sign it (I’ve never been so nervous about writing my name), which made me feel like some kind of superstar. Thanks for all the hugs, lunches, dinners, phone calls where I rant incoherently, and everything else you have always done for me. I’m finally done with school. I imagine that’s almost as much a relief for you as it is for me.

I want to thank the other half of the “Dynamic Duo,” Dr. Carolyn Day, for her help, advice, and friendship, above all else. You have been there for me through everything over the last ten years and I cannot thank you enough. I apologize for the times that I shunned all forms of communication longer than I should have. Your friendship has always meant the world to me and I am sorry for any times where I seemed to take advantage of it. I have always enjoyed our talks, academic or otherwise, on the phone or in person. I look forward to our continued friendship, and hope, now that school is finally finished, that we can find ways to see each other more often. Besides, I’m sure it’s cold in CC’s.

I can never thank Dr. Benjamin Martin enough for serving as my advisor during my ten years at LSU. During our first conversation, before I had even officially enrolled, my ignorance of nearly anything historical positively radiated. I didn't know any of the people you mentioned. I hadn't read any of the authors you discussed. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I'm pretty sure you knew that. The B - - - I scored on my exam in your class my first semester showed me just how much work I needed to do. Your feedback on my assignments, my thesis chapters, and my dissertation pushed me to become the best graduate student and historian I can be. I will always dig for specific details. I will never describe something as "very" anything ever again. I am destined, however, to be forever haunted by "dangling participles." Thank you for all the help you have given over the years, and especially for your help in the last year with my extension and other "complications." One final and important note: the answer is 1945.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT.....	vi
CHAPTER	
ONE CONSPIRACY DEFINED	1
TWO LEADERSHIP OF NAPOLEON	20
THREE <i>CONSPIRATION DES POIGNARDS</i>	69
FOUR INFERNAL MACHINE PLOT	89
FIVE CADOUDAL, PICHEGRU, AND MOREAU	133
SIX GENERAL MALET, 1812	167
SEVEN CONCLUSION.....	225
REFERENCES	237
VITA.....	250

ABSTRACT

An in-depth analysis of primary source material indicates that the conspiracies hatched against Napoleon served as the impetus for his decision to change the government from the Consulate to the Empire. His ambitious personality drove him to achieve as much power and prestige for himself as possible, a point discussed by numerous historians, but the conspiratorial actions designed to strike him down provided the opportunity. He was a master of manipulating situations—and people—in order to achieve his ambitious goals. Knowing that his constituents worried over renewed political turmoil if something happened to him, Napoleon used their fears to strengthen his personal grasp on power. By accepting the position of First Consul for life, he made a promise to French citizens that he would protect and serve them for the duration of his life. By then taking the title of Emperor, he promised that his *family* would protect and serve the nation in perpetuity.

CHAPTER ONE CONSPIRACY DEFINED

The retreat of the *Grand Armée* from the disastrous Russian campaign of 1812 was already underway, but distressing news from Paris prompted Napoleon to rush back to the capital ahead of his troops, leaving them to languish in miserable conditions. A political malcontent had gathered a group of similarly dissatisfied individuals to attempt to overthrow the imperial government. Accomplishing the arrest—or recruitment—of numerous high-ranking political officials, the conspiracy had nearly succeeded. Napoleon was horrified that an escaped political prisoner could so easily threaten all he had created.

The nearly-successful conspiracy launched by General Claude François de Malet on the night of 22 October 1812 was not the first plot Napoleon endured. It was, however, the one that frightened him the most because there was no way to use it to his advantage. Previously, he had transformed conspiracies designed to destroy his regime into opportunities for strengthening his power. A poorly conceived and clumsily executed plot on 10 October 1800 provided the First Consul with the excuse to rid himself of 130 Jacobin dissidents by deporting them without trial. Less than three months later, on 24 December, a Royalist plot missed assassinating Napoleon by mere seconds. In response, the First Consul authorized the establishment of special criminal courts in more than half of the nation's departments. He also strengthened his resolve to reach a compromise with the Catholic Church, a move he knew would weaken the Royalist support base. After a reprise of several years from conspiratorial opposition, Napoleon faced another plot in winter 1804. The Royalists planned a final attempt against him, though it never came to fruition. Betrayed by people within the conspiracy itself, the group failed to take even the slightest action against the First Consul. Napoleon used the thwarted effort as an excuse to transform his

position as Consul for Life to that of Emperor, finalizing his post as the sole political leader of France.

In the work that follows, I show that the conspiracies hatched against Napoleon served as the impetus for his decision to change the government from the Consulate to the Empire. His ambitious personality drove him to achieve as much power and prestige for himself as possible, a point discussed by numerous historians, but the conspiratorial actions designed to strike him down provided the opportunity. He was a master of manipulating situations—and people—in order to achieve his ambitious goals. Knowing that his constituents worried over renewed political turmoil if something happened to him, Napoleon used their fears to strengthen his personal grasp on power. By accepting the position of First Consul for life, he made a promise to French citizens that he would protect and serve them for the duration of his life. By then taking the title of Emperor, he promised that his *family* would protect and serve the nation in perpetuity.

At first glance, the conception of conspiracy seems easy to define: a secret plot designed by a group of people to enact some type of change. The explanation is not, in fact, so simple. Historians have dated the use of terms concerning conspiracy in French to as early as the twelfth century.¹ The meaning of said terms, however, has changed a great deal over time and often illustrates concerns of the time period. A French dictionary published in 1761, for example, defines *conjurat* as “a group of men united together against the interests of a State, of a Sovereign, etc.”² The exclusion of the government as a possible perpetrator derives from the

¹ These early terms include *conspirer* (“to conspire”), *conspiration*, *compot*, and *conjurat*, each of which best translates as “conspiracy.” The term *conspirateur* (“conspirator”) did not develop until much later, in the fourteenth or fifteenth century.

² The idea that the government was the victim, rather than the perpetrator, of conspiracies is evidenced in definitions for conspiratorial terms in several dictionaries dating from 1761-1813.

government's control of publications and, as some historians have argued, from its desire to "appear paternal."³ The authority of the monarchy depended on the people's belief that it looked out for their interests. If the government plotted against them, rather than protect them, it no longer served its purpose.

Modern conceptions of conspiracy, unlike those of eighteenth-century France, allow for the government as the conspirator. Dictionary definitions for conspiratorial terms, however, have become less specific over time and often do not explain who was involved, either as the plotter or the victim. A modern French dictionary, for example, defines *conjuración* as "an action prepared secretly by a group of people (against someone or something)."⁴ Here, anyone could be involved on any side of the plot and for any reason. Unlike earlier definitions which indicated that conspiracies were inherently political, modern explanations are intentionally vague and allow for more possibilities, such as Ponzi schemes, cover-ups of alien invasions and the intentional creation of epidemics.

The purpose of a dictionary is to provide the most concise definition possible, allowing little space for examples or in-depth explanations. Historians, philosophers, and other scholars are not constrained in such a manner and provide more thorough descriptions in their works. They write that plots and their participants must meet certain criteria to justify describing the

Pierre Richelet, *Dictionnaire portatif de la langue françoise, extrait du grand dictionnaire de Pierre Richelet; contenant tous les mots usités, leur genre & leur définition, avec les différentes acceptions dans lesquelles ils sont employés, au sens propre, comma au figuré*, second edition (Lyon: Chez Pierre Bruyset-Ponthus, 1761), 263-264, 267. Claude-Marie Gattel, *Dictionnaire universel portatif de la langue française, avec la prononciation figurée*, second edition (Paris: Chez Lefevre, 1813), 1: 414.

³ Léon Biollay, *Études économiques sur le XVIII^e siècle: Le Pacte de famine, l'administration du commerce* (Paris: Librairie Guillaumin et C^{ie}, 1885), 4.

⁴ Alain Rey, ed., *Le Robert Micro: Dictionnaire d'apprentissage de la langue française*, third edition (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1998), 267.

actions as conspiratorial. Without considering these conditions, one could name nearly any planned event as a conspiracy, such as “conspiracies to throw surprise birthday parties for friends or attempts by parents to deceive young children about the existence of magical beings.”⁵ One of the most thorough discussions of conspiracies comes from Niccolo Machiavelli, writing during the Renaissance era. In his work, he identified five necessary traits to elevate a simple plan to the level of a conspiracy.

To start, the plot must involve at least two participants. A single individual could never hatch a conspiracy, regardless of whether the plot met other necessary criteria. This conception originates with the etymology of the term conspiracy: “con,” meaning with and “spire,” from the Latin meaning to breathe. Not only must there be multiple participants, but the conspirators must also be so closely united in their efforts that they “*breathe together* as if they are, in a sense, one being—one animal.”⁶ Although he prescribes no upper limit on the number of people who can participate in a conspiracy, Machiavelli warns that if the group’s membership “exceeds three or four,” the plot is almost guaranteed to fail because it will be discovered by authorities.⁷ The more people who are involved, the more chance there is that someone will betray the plot, intentionally or not.

In addition to urging a limit on the number of plotters, Machiavelli argues that only a certain type of person should dare to concoct such a scheme. In his opinion, participants in a

⁵ Brian L. Keeley, “Of Conspiracy Theories,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 96, no. 3 (March 1999): 118.

⁶ Jens David Ohlin, “Group Think: The Law of Conspiracy and Collective Reason,” *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 98, no. 1 (Fall, 2007): 157-158.

⁷ Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Historical, Political and Diplomatic Writings of Niccolo Machiavelli*, 4 vols., translated by Christian E. Detmold (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1882), 2: 335.

conspiracy must either be well-off or “madmen.”⁸ Only “great men of state, or those on terms of familiar intercourse with the prince,” he explains, have any hope of leading a successful conspiracy.⁹ These men have the contacts and financial means to support their plot sufficiently. They have the ability to assure their cohorts of significant gains for joining the project. Should someone undertake a conspiracy without plentiful assets, he will likely fail because he will not have the means to ensure payment for his colleagues’ participation. Once informed of the plot, if the accomplices are unsure of the advantages they will earn by participating, they are likely to denounce the scheme in order to receive any reward offered by the authorities. Machiavelli also explains that a conspirator who lacks high standing (political, military or social) will only attract others of equally low or even lesser standing. He implies that men “of low condition” are inherently less trustworthy and are more likely to denounce a plot than men of considerable rank.¹⁰

The danger of denunciation coincides with what Machiavelli views as another fundamental trait of conspiracies: secrecy. If the plotters met and planned openly, concerned citizens or the authorities would inevitably move against them. Machiavelli discusses three particular methods of discovery that often hinder conspiratorial efforts, each of which depends directly on the reliability of the intriguers. Discovery from imprudence occurs when a conspirator unwittingly speaks freely enough that some uninvolved person overhears details of the plot. Such detection might take place, for example, when a servant overhears part of a conversation when entering a room. Discovery of the plot may also take place through carelessness when a conspirator willingly, though foolishly, discloses information to a family

⁸ Machiavelli, *The Historical, Political and Diplomatic Writings*, 2: 332.

⁹ Machiavelli, *The Historical, Political and Diplomatic Writings*, 2: 332.

¹⁰ Machiavelli, *The Historical, Political and Diplomatic Writings*, 2: 332.

member or some other person he deems trustworthy. Because of the friendship or familial ties between them, the plotter does not expect that he has put himself or the plot in danger. The final form of discovery is through treason. If a participant takes it upon himself to denounce the plot outright to authorities, he has intentionally and voluntarily betrayed the group. He may decide to take such actions if he thinks better of the plot, if he feels that the rewards do not outweigh the risk (fear for his freedom, his life, or his family, for example), or if he feels that his cohorts are treating him unfairly. While he would certainly earn the ire of his former co-conspirators, a participant who denounced plots to authorities often received much lighter punishments or even compensation.

Machiavelli identifies two more traits necessary for a plot to constitute a conspiracy: political nature and violence. Conspiracies are, in his opinion, “made either against the country or against the prince.”¹¹ Much like the definition of conspiratorial terms in eighteenth-century France, he does not allow for the possibility of the government’s plotting against its subjects. The political character of the plot is exactly what necessitates the use of violence. Although he does not explain this correlation directly, when discussing historical conspiracies, he centers his examples on assassinations, kidnappings, and other unlawful activities. A group of disgruntled citizens cannot spontaneously remove a political leader from power through legal means. Violence is necessary to enact immediate and dramatic political change.

Augustin Barruel, author of *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire du jacobinisme*, which some consider “the bible of the secret society mythology,” agrees with Machiavelli on two inherent traits of conspiracies.¹² While both men conclude that conspiracies are violent, Barruel

¹¹ Machiavelli, *The Historical, Political and Diplomatic Writings*, 2: 329.

¹² John Morris Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies* (New York: Scribner, 1972), 193.

does not believe that a plot's political nature is the cause. Instead, he reveals that the radical disposition of the masterminds of the plot are responsible for its violence. Extremist leaders, with a vehement opposition to any form of compromise, find themselves with violence as their only course of action. This claim implies that rational-minded people do not devise conspiracies. Machiavelli and Barruel also agree that secrecy is required for a conspiracy to exist, but each approaches this trait differently. Whereas Machiavelli focuses on the problems a lack of secrecy would bring to a plot, Barruel describes exactly what it is that must remain secret. He argues that it is not the plot's goal that needs to remain confidential, though one can imagine the more secrecy the conspirators maintain, the better the chance of success. What is crucial for the plotters to keep private is "the names of the conspirators, and the means they employed."¹³ If authorities discovered a plot against the government, they could take little action if the specific intended activities and the people involved remained unknown to them.

Going beyond Machiavelli's discussion, Barruel identifies two additional traits of conspiracies. He argues that conspirators arranged themselves in a hierarchy to allow for better organization and a higher chance of success. This method of organization strengthens the level of secrecy that the group could achieve. Such a system allows the elites of the group to make decisions for everyone and to disseminate just enough information to keep everyone informed of his own personal role. The fewer details shared among the participants, the less chance of discovery. After all, if a low-ranked conspirator reveals everyone's identities and contacts during an interrogation, the entire group faces prosecution. If, on the other hand, he is only

¹³ Augustin Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism, Vol. I: The Antichristian Conspiracy* (London: T. Burton and Co., 1797), 39.

aware of a handful of people involved, with the most superior members remaining unknown to him, the group can survive an interrogation, even if the conspirator reveals all he knows.

Barruel discusses a final characteristic of conspiratorial plots, one only recognizable after their implementation: a self-destructive nature. He argues that if a conspiracy manages to avoid discovery and to achieve its goal, the success will be short-lived. The idea that a conspiracy will ultimately self-destruct provides some scholars with a partial explanation for the violent opposition to Napoleon and his regimes. It was, after all, a conspiracy that brought him to power on 18 Brumaire. Benjamin Constant, a contemporary of Barruel, agrees that a regime established through arbitrary or conspiratorial means has little chance of long-term survival. In his *De la force du gouvernement actuel de la France et de la nécessité de s'y rallier*, he explains that such governments lack “dignity and lasting strength,” and will find themselves constantly embroiled in conflict, both domestic and foreign.¹⁴ Historian François Guizot, who lived to see both Napoleon and his nephew rule France, concurs with Constant’s conclusion about the inherent weakness of regimes founded on the sudden destruction of its predecessor. He argues that a “new government founded on the ruins of another has real enemies who desire its fall and rejoice in that which can contribute to it.”¹⁵

Augustin Barruel also discusses the importance of secretive plots to history in his work. He contends that conspiracies—the participants, decisions, and outcomes—are a major driving force behind the progression of history. Modern historians frequently argue against this idea. Karl Popper’s *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* concludes that

¹⁴ Benjamin Constant, *De la force du gouvernement actuel de la France et de la nécessité de s'y rallier* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1796?), 103-104.

¹⁵ François Guizot, *Des Conspirations et de la justice politique* (Paris: Imprimerie de Fain, 1821), 26.

conspiratorial actions do not have the influence or the power to determine the outcome of history. Instead, Popper finds that it is chance and other intangible forces that guide individuals and nations down their paths. I find Barruel's argument more convincing. A conspiracy placed Napoleon in power, and plots against him resulted in his ability to achieve a hereditary grasp on political control of the nation. He used conspiracies against the Consulate to rid the nation of dozens of his political opponents, to strengthen and control better the judicial system, and to justify his promotion to Emperor. Without the plots against him and the fear they caused among the nation's general population, Napoleon may not have achieved such complete control of the country, and certainly not as quickly as he did.

I believe that the argument of an inherent weakness in the Consular and Imperial regimes because of their conspiratorial naissance presents only a partial picture of the situation. Surely people resented the manner in which Napoleon came to power, but the complexity of the political situation in fall 1799 would have prevented any regime from enjoying immediate stability and security. The numerous factions that caused constant turmoil for the Revolutionary governments still existed, at least in part, at the introduction of the Consulate. In agreement with my conclusion is Émile Marco de Saint-Hilaire's *Histoire des conspirations et attentats contre le gouvernement et la personne de Napoléon*. Saint-Hilaire contends that there were simply too many differing opinions for a regime not to face open and violent opposition at the time. He illustrates the point by describing the opinions of Napoleon: "murderer of liberty for the republicans, usurper of the throne of Louis XVI for the royalists, oppressor of the people for a third part who recruited their henchmen from the heart of German secret societies."¹⁶

¹⁶ Émile Marco de Saint-Hilaire, *Histoire des conspirations et attentats contre le gouvernement et la personne de Napoléon* (Paris: Charles Fellens, 1847), 6.

Until now, historical sources have given little attention to the role played by conspiracies in Napoleon's transition from First Consul to Emperor. The majority of available materials, most of which are biographical or are almost entirely focused on military affairs, discuss the schemes in less than a paragraph. In fact, many modern works do not discuss them in any detail at all. Books that offer more thorough accounts of the conspiracies against Napoleon are more than a century old, and are, more often than not, written in French. They also fail to explain the importance of the events to Napoleon's career. Further distorting the importance of conspiratorial actions is the traditional emphasis on the military aspect of Napoleon's leadership. Although it is both impossible and improper to attempt a general discussion of this period of history without considering Napoleon's focus on the military, this aspect of his career was not responsible for his ability, or even for his desire to convert the Consulate into the Empire. It is these issues and this gap in the scholarship that my work remedies.

By highlighting a sense of disillusionment with Napoleon's leadership in the military, several sources imply that active servicemen were the most likely citizens to conspire against the Consulate and Empire. One such source is Frank McLynn's *Napoleon: A Biography*. The work presents the argument that the incessant fighting that marked Napoleon's regimes prompted servicemen to plot against the leader simply to achieve peace for a war-weary nation. Édouard Guillon's *Les Complots militaires sous le Consulat et l'Empire* also implies that the military provided the majority of conspirators, but not due to any warmongering by Napoleon. Instead, Guillon contends that policies such as "the recalling of émigrés, [and] especially the negotiations

with the court of Rome for the Concordat” caused servicemen to take unlawful action against Napoleon.¹⁷

The implications of both McLynn’s and Guillon’s arguments are misleading. Soldiers and civilians alike did grow tired of constant warfare, but the weariness did not play a significant role in the development of conspiracies against Napoleon. Although high-ranking officers participated in all but one of the plots discussed in my work, only one individual described a desire for peace as his motivation. This individual was General Malet, whose most significant efforts took place in 1812 when Napoleon’s streak of victories on the battlefield had been disastrously broken. Even during his two earlier efforts against the leader, Malet cited different reasons for conspiring.

Guillon’s argument that many soldiers resented Napoleon’s willingness to compromise with the Catholic Church is correct, but again, it did not serve as a significant cause of conspiratorial action. Only two participants in a single plot considered the negotiations offensive enough to warrant action. These men were Dominique Demerville and François Jean-Baptiste Topino-Lebrun, who participated in the *conspiration des poignards* (conspiracy of the daggers) in October 1800. Their other accomplices did not describe the possibility of France’s renewed relationship with the Church as a motivating factor, nor did any conspirators who acted later.¹⁸

In *L’épisode napoléonien*, Louis Bergeron dedicates three pages to a discussion of conspiracies launched against Napoleon. He begins by arguing that only “a military plot would

¹⁷ Édouard Guillon, *Les Complots militaires sous le Consulat et l’Empire: d’après les documents inédits des Archives* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit & Co., 1894), 6.

¹⁸ It is important to note that the *conspiration des poignards* took place well before the signing of the Concordat. If the relationship between Church and State was as offensive to French servicemen as Guillon argues, one would expect to see more conspiracies at the time of the Concordat, or at least more conspirators citing it as their motivation.

have presented a real danger, of clear political significance, if solidly planned with civilian participation.”¹⁹ Only Malet attempted what one could consider “a military plot,” fooling an entire garrison of troops into supporting his cause. He did not, however, benefit from any civilian support. Bergeron’s argument implies that plots without military backing could not pose serious threats, dismissing the importance of the *conspiration des poignards*, the explosion of the infernal machine on 24 December 1800, and the Royalist effort of winter 1804. He offers little information about these particular events. Discussing them in the vaguest of terms, he provides only dates and the names of the primary participants.

Bergeron is not the only scholar to misrepresent the motivating factors behind conspiracies against Napoleon. In the introduction to *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe: From the Waldensians to the French Revolution*, historians Barry Coward and Julian Swann contend that people resort to “cloak and dagger methods” when they feel there is no longer any “space for public expressions of opposition or dissent.”²⁰ According to these two historians, the perception that no other recourse is available makes conspiratorial efforts “understandable.”²¹ This particular term poses subjectivity issues. Because “understandable” seems inappropriate where murder and other unlawful activities form the basis of discussion, I believe a more acceptable term is “rational”: it allows a sense of empathy toward the conspirator without justifying his actions.

¹⁹ Louis Bergeron, *L'épisode napoléonien, aspects intérieurs: 1799-1815* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), translated by R. R. Palmer as *France Under Napoleon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 97.

²⁰ Barry Coward and Julian Swann, introduction to *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe: From the Waldensians to the French Revolution*, ed. Barry Coward and Julian Swann (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 5.

²¹ Coward, introduction to *Conspiracies*, 5.

The idea that individuals resort to conspiracies when they feel there is no alternative is upheld by Mark Fenster. He explains that a population—or an individual element therein—often adopts subversive actions when it feels helpless to change its social, political or economic situation through legal means. A conspiracy seeks, he argues, to correct situations that have left “the political subject without an ability to be recognized or to achieve representation in the public realm.”²²

It is a fact that French citizens saw fewer opportunities for voicing dissenting opinions under Napoleon’s leadership, but this was not responsible for widespread conspiratorial actions as Coward, Swann, and Fenster imply. As the opportunity for lawful opposition to the government diminished, the number of conspiracies hatched against the Consulate—and against Napoleon personally—increased, but only until the institution of the Imperial regime. Once Napoleon became Emperor, the expectation of having a voice in the government faded completely. Instead of prompting even more conspiracies, the creation of the French Empire stopped them. Conspirators only resented not being able to voice an oppositional opinion when the expectation of doing so was present. The establishment of the Imperial government removed the expectation of a popular voice in politics, with a result in the decline in conspiratorial actions.

Offering still more possible motivating factors behind the conspiracies against Napoleon is Ernest Hamel’s *Histoire du Premier Empire faisant suite à l’histoire de la République sous le Directoire et le Consulat*. He discusses weariness caused by continuous conscription practices, the reestablishment of the nobility (14 August 1806), and the oppression of freedom of speech and freedom of the press as reasons for conspirators to act against the nation’s leader. He

²² Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 67.

contends that freedom of the press had never been as restricted as it was under the First Empire. Other complaints expressed by Frenchmen receive attention as well, but Hamel does not consider them as offensive. He explains, for example, that Napoleon's revitalization of the feudal terms *monsieur* and *madame* annoyed Republicans, even those who may have supported him. The situations Hamel discusses certainly did cause disappointment among French citizens, but my research shows that none of those who chose to plot against Napoleon listed them as their motivation.

In agreement with my findings are those of Steven Englund. In his *Napoleon: A Political Life*, he acknowledges that the leader made decisions that directly diminished some of the gains of the Revolution, but he does not believe they were as significant a cause of disappointment among Frenchmen as other scholars have claimed. For example, whereas Hamel explains that the censorship of the press was a leading cause of dissent in Napoleonic France, Englund counters that the "tight official grip on the press was a policy that French society found largely unobjectionable."²³

The misrepresentation of motivating factors in the above-mentioned works may be explained by Bergeron's conclusion that when it comes to conspiratorial activities, "it is simply impossible to unravel the true from the imaginary, or conspiracy from provocation."²⁴ The argument is not convincing, though it is excusable given the sweeping nature of the works discussed thus far. These were not books specifically about conspiracy, but about Napoleon, his leadership, and life in the Consulate and Empire in general. One would not expect the authors, therefore, to have dedicated as much time to researching the clandestine events. My specific

²³ Steven Englund, *Napoleon: A Political Life* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 172.

²⁴ Bergeron, *L'épisode napoléonien*, 98.

focus on conspiracies launched against Napoleon results in the conclusion that neither military concerns nor the inability to voice dissenting opinions caused the plots. The close examination of primary source materials allows me to provide a detailed case by case explanation of what motivated the conspirators, of what they hoped to achieve, and of how they planned to act.

I used three types of primary source materials—letters, memoirs, and court records—as the basis for analyzing the conspiracies. The letters form the smallest portion of my research as they are not as plentiful or readily available as other sources. Conspirators were careful not to keep written accounts of their plans or actions, as they would be almost entirely impossible to refute in court. Conspiratorial correspondence that does exist is written in code, utilizes aliases, or includes no names whatsoever. Because codes can be broken, aliases discovered, and handwriting analyzed, the letters offer historians insight into the personalities and mentalities of the citizens who felt that their only hope of escaping Napoleon’s leadership was through unlawful plots. Unfortunately, none of the letters provide details about the plots themselves. There is no incriminating evidence in them, for example, to explain who was to take what specific action or when.

Memoirs from the period are abundant and offer explanations of how the conspiracies unfolded. In the case of the Royalist effort of winter 1804 and Malet’s plot of 1812, historians benefit from accounts written by some of the conspirators themselves. Louis Fauche-Borel served as an intermediary between the Bourbon princes in England and their supporters in France, such as General Jean-Charles Pichegru. In *Notices sur les généraux Pichegru et Moreau*, he explains the relationship between the two generals and how they came to be involved in a plot designed to reestablish the Bourbon monarchy. His account is reliable as it makes no excuse for the unlawful actions the group attempted, readily admitting that a plot was underway

and identifying each of the participants. Abbé Jean Baptiste Hyacinthe Lafon, one of Malet's accomplices from the outset in 1812, escaped Paris after the conspiracy fell apart and published *Histoire de la conjuration du Général Malet* two years later. His account is the most informative source for background information about less crucial members of the team. He provides, for example, an explanation of the legal troubles that landed Joseph Boccheiampe in prison, from where Malet recruited him. This information is not available in other sources, even in the court records which provide biographical and criminal information about many of the other participants.

Memoirs written by citizens outside of the plots provide an understanding of reactions to the conspiracies. Laure Junot, Duchess of Abrantès, describes in her memoirs the panic that ensued at the Theatre of the Republic and of the Arts when the audience heard the explosion of the infernal machine on Christmas Eve 1800. Napoleon's secretaries and other high-ranking officials also published memoirs, which offer insight into the leader's own reaction to and opinion of the plots against him. Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne recorded in his *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* that the First Consul described the *conspiration des poignards* as one of the most serious threats he had endured during his reign. He also explained, however, that he doubted that Napoleon had actually made such a comment. The secretary believed that the First Consul wanted it to *seem* as if the plot had disturbed him, though in reality, it had not. Joseph Fouché, the infamous minister of police, stated directly in his *Memoirs* that the plot had not been truly dangerous, but that Napoleon wanted it portrayed as such to use it to his greatest advantage.

The most informative resources about the conspiracies are court records. I have based my telling of the conspiracies themselves on two particular types of court document: the *acte d'accusation* (bill of indictment) and the *procès* (trial). The *acte d'accusation* provides the

identity of each of the accused, an explanation of the charges brought against them, and a summary of events and developments relevant to said charges. It includes an extremely detailed summary of the information divulged by each of the defendants during their interrogations. In the *acte d'accusation* concerning the Royalist conspiracy in winter 1804, the section about Louis Picot contains the fact that he testified to possessing “blue hunters’ uniforms” for himself and his accomplices to wear.²⁵ Even more useful to a historian is the verbatim reproductions of evidentiary documents. The *acte d'accusation* for the 1804 plot includes the letters written by General Jean-Victor Marie Moreau denouncing General Pichegru for his involvement with the Royalists in 1797. These letters were not directly related to the charges filed in 1804, but the prosecution used them to demonstrate that both generals had been dealing with the Royalists for the better part of a decade.

The *procès* includes much of the same information as the *acte d'accusation*. Descriptions of each of the defendants provide full names (usually), aliases, ages, places of birth, job titles, and current (or the most recently known) street addresses. They also include the explanation of the charges and a summary of events relevant to them, though not in as much detail as the *acte d'accusation*. Verbatim reproductions of evidentiary documents appear here as well, but even more useful are the word-for-word depositions given by each of the defendants shortly after their arrests. These are often woven into the testimony underway at the trial, separated by headers with dates to illustrate when the information was recorded. At the end of the document are the findings of the jury, any information concerning appeals, and the final verdict and sentence.

²⁵ *Acte d'accusation de Georges, Pichegru, Moreau, et autres, prévenus de conspiration contre la personne du Premier Consul et contre la sûreté intérieure et extérieure de la République* (Paris: Imprimerie de C. F. Patris, an XII), 67.

By considering all primary source materials simultaneously, I am able to conclude that each conspiracy was driven by different motivations. The *conspiration des poignards* in October 1800 resulted from the participants' resentment of Napoleon's "abandonment" of the Italian Republics he had created, their disgust over the increasing tolerance toward and ongoing negotiations with the Catholic Church, and personal vendettas held against the First Consul. Édouard Guillon discussed the fact that many Frenchmen resented the signing of the Concordat, but the only time the revitalization of religion was listed as a cause of conspiracy was *prior* to the creation of this document. Guillon also implies that the bitterness toward the renewed relationship between Church and State was most prevalent in the military, but of the two conspirators who took action because of it, only one had served in the military. No historical analyses discuss the role played by personal vendettas in prompting unlawful actions against Napoleon, though two conspirators in the *conspiration des poignards* listed it as their motivation.

The infernal machine plot of 24 December 1800 and the effort of winter 1804 were Royalist creations. The ultimate motivating factor for the conspirators was their desire to restore the Bourbon family to the throne of France. Beyond that, however, was the participants' desire to obtain personal power, prestige, and wealth. By serving the Bourbon family the conspirators stood to receive titles, property, and substantial salaries. In 1804, for example, Louis Joseph de Bourbon, the Prince of Condé, offered General Jean-Charles Pichegru the estate at Chambord, a massive annual salary, and a stipend for his descendants "in perpetuity, until the extinction of his line."²⁶

Only General Claude François de Malet provided reasons for plotting against Napoleon that correspond with the ideas presented in historical works. He lamented the loss of

²⁶ *Le Moniteur Universel*, 23 Fructidor V, 9 September 1797.

Revolutionary gains, specifically the citizens' direct involvement in politics. Even more important to him, however, was the desire to put an end to the nearly constant warfare that characterized Napoleon's reign. Malet's was the only effort that enjoyed any level of success, which is attributable to his organizational skills and his patience.

Despite the number of conspiracies launched against Napoleon, the high status of some of their participants, and the reactions the leader had toward them, these events receive little attention in the existing literature on Napoleonic France. Because Napoleon was able to transform the plots into excuses to increase his personal grasp on political control of the nation, they deserve detailed and thorough discussions. I intend for my work to provide this information and to shine light on these previously overlooked events.

CHAPTER TWO LEADERSHIP OF NAPOLEON

By the time Napoleon Bonaparte seized power in 1799, France had experienced the abolition of its monarchy and three failed Republican governments comprising constantly warring factions. Frenchmen had little expectation that any new regime would last and even less faith that it would improve their daily situation. Napoleon made significant strides toward a bettering of people's lives, but in so doing, he also stoked the flames of political opposition. Compromise worked well for the Frenchmen who concerned themselves more with day-to-day life than with politics. For those with intense political passions, however, the Revolution's wounds ran deep. Any attempt at healing brought relief to some citizens, but renewed suffering to others. The precarious situation Napoleon took possession of on 18 Brumaire meant that he and his government were destined to face incessant political opposition.

In July 1790, France had replaced its absolutist monarchy with a constitutional one. Most Revolutionaries supported the regime, as even those who desired a full-fledged republic acknowledged that France was not yet ready for such a government. National Guardsman Claude-François de Malet explained this train of thought in a letter dated 13 December 1791: "I would prefer a Republic, but I am convinced that it would not suit us at this particular time. We are still experiencing too many effects from the corruption of the old regime, and the Republic can only exist with and by the virtues that unfortunately, we do not yet possess and that only experience can give us."²⁷ One gains experience through trial and error, and France's efforts with creating a Republican government were just that. Due to threats from foreign nations' leaders, Louis XVI's unwillingness to adhere to the constitution that he had supposedly accepted,

²⁷ Frédéric Masson, *La Vie et les conspirations du Général Malet, 1754-1812*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, 1920), 17.

and the royal family's effort to escape France, the nation found itself challenged with creating its third government by September 1792.²⁸

Although another regime eventually succeeded it, the latest government, the National Convention, caused the nation's deepest political wound.²⁹ Declaring France a republic on 22 September 1792, the government then found Louis XVI guilty of crimes against the state and the public's liberty.³⁰ With the monarchy violently dispatched, the political lines were clear.

²⁸ The royal family had attempted to flee from France in June 1791, intending to travel to Austria where the monarchs hoped to receive support and protection from Marie-Antoinette's imperial family. Recognized by Jean-Baptiste Drouet along the way, the family found itself under arrest at Varennes. The so-called "flight to Varennes" was a clear sign that Louis XVI was entirely unwilling to accept ruling as a constitutional monarch. He intended to rule, as his ancestors had done, in an absolute fashion. Anything less would, as the attempted escape proved, be met with hostility and opposition.

On 1 August 1792, Parisians received a document written by Charles William Ferdinand, the Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg, announcing the intention of the Holy Roman Empire to restore the French monarchy to the *ancien régime* standards and threatening the city if any ill befell their Bourbon monarchs. He menaced: "if the chateau of the Tuileries is entered by force or attacked, if the least violence be offered to their Majesties the king, queen, and royal family, and if their safety and their liberty be not immediately assured, they will inflict an ever memorable vengeance by delivering over the city of Paris to military execution and complete destruction, and the rebels guilty of the said outrages to the punishment that they merit." James Harvey Robinson, ed., *Readings in European History: A Collection of Extracts from the Sources, Chosen with the Purpose of Illustrating the Progress of Culture in Western Europe since the German Invasions* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1906), 2: 445.

Historians debate the true authorship of the Brunswick Manifesto. D. M. G. Sutherland says the *émigrés* actually authored the document. H. A. Barton states that it was Count Axel von Fersen who "commissioned the draft manifesto ultimately signed by the Duke of Brunswick." D. M. G. Sutherland, *France, 1789-1815: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 149. H. A. Barton, "The Origins of the Brunswick Manifesto," *French Historical Studies* 5, no. 2 (Autumn, 1967): 147.

The previous two governments were the National Constituent Assembly (9 July 1789 – 30 September 1791) and the Legislative Assembly (1 October 1791 – 20 September 1792).

²⁹ The Directory would be France's final republican government before Napoleon's political involvement began. It ruled from 3 November 1795 – 9 November 1799.

³⁰ Of the Convention's delegates, 683 found the monarch guilty of the 33 charges he faced and 28 did not vote because they were absent from the assembly (8 sick, 20 away on business). When deciding the sentence for the crimes, 387 favored the death penalty with no conditions attached, and 334 favored a sentence of imprisonment, exile, or death with a pardon. Twenty-eight delegates refused to cast a vote at all concerning sentencing. Jean-Charles Poncelin de La

Supporters of the Bourbon monarchy rallied to install Louis XVII on his family's throne, while the Revolutionaries turned their efforts to establishing a stable Republican government. No Republican government could realistically expect to gain the support of the Royalists. The Royalists, for their part, would have to fight an uphill battle to reinstate Bourbon control of a country whose population had grown to distrust and to loathe the monarchy and its excesses. Time would be the only permanent remedy for political division.

Napoleon Bonaparte and his personal ambitions could not wait for time to pass. If he wanted to achieve his goals, he had to take matters into his own hands. The nation's public, constantly disillusioned by Revolutionary "heroes" such as Maximilien Robespierre, had begun looking to the military for its champions. Napoleon Bonaparte was a household name throughout France—and even throughout Europe as a whole. Madame Germaine de Staël explained the place he held in French minds as early as 1797: "One already spoke a lot of General Bonaparte in Paris; the superiority of his business mind, together with the brilliance of his talents as general, gave his name an importance that no other individual had acquired since the beginning of the Revolution."³¹ His victories on the battlefield may have won him a prized spot in the hearts of the masses, but many high-ranking military and political officials were not impressed.

One of Napoleon's own brothers, Lucien, who served as president of the Council of Five Hundred in fall 1800, had recognized from young age a controlling and ruthless personality in

Roche-Tilhac, *Le Procès de Louis XVI, ou Collection complete de tous les Discours, Opinions, Plaidoyers, publiés pour ou contre Louis XVI, dans le grand procès pendant au tribunal de la Nation, avec les pièces justificatives des differens faits qui lui sont imputé* (Paris: Chez Debarle, 1795), 5: 100, 106, 140.

³¹ Germaine de Staël, *Considérations sur la Révolution française* (Paris: Charpentier Libraire-Éditeur, 1862), 1: 476.

the general: “I have always been aware of a completely selfish ambition in Napoleone He seems to me to have the potentialities of a tyrant and I believe that he would be one if he were a king.”³² Napoleon’s actions in Egypt as the campaign grew increasingly desperate incensed members of the Directorial government and military officers alike. Jean-Baptiste Kléber, who felt that the general had abandoned him and his troops, complained bitterly to those who remained with him in Egypt: “He’s left us with his breeches full of shit. We’ll go back to Europe and rub it in his face.”³³ Minister of War Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte argued in favor of arresting Napoleon on charges of desertion and circumventing the regulations requiring a quarantine on ships traveling to France from the Orient. Officials may have wanted Bonaparte to face charges, but the public loved him, and, unwilling to upset the populace that had proven itself so volatile throughout the Revolution, the government took no action against him.³⁴

Having returned from Egypt, Napoleon prepared to take advantage of his already obvious popularity and the mistrust and disappointment the nation felt in its current regime. The

³² J. Christopher Herold, *The Age of Napoleon* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963), 36.

³³ Frank McLynn, *Napoleon: A Biography* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2002), 198-199.

³⁴ The Directory had, in fact, ordered Napoleon to return to France, *with* or *without* his troops, in May 1799. Such correspondence sanctions his voyage, even though he opted to leave his soldiers behind in Kléber’s command. Scholars note, however, that Napoleon had not received the directive due to the blockage that had prevented communication between his troops and the continent for nearly a year. It is the fact that he had not actually received the order to return to France that makes the argument for militarily criminal allegations possible.

Napoleon’s personal secretary in Egypt, Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne recognized that the general’s departure from Egypt had been duplicitous, but he stopped short of calling the event an abandonment. He also acknowledged that Napoleon and his ship failed to meet quarantine standards, he claimed that the lapse was due to the reaction of the people of Fréjus, where he landed, rather than any decision made by those aboard. After reaching the port, the ship’s crew attempted to adhere to the regulations, but their efforts were nullified once news spread that Bonaparte was one of the passengers. Even after learning that the ship had not been cleared, the local population rushed toward the vessel in support. Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, *Mémoires de M. de Bourrienne, ministre d’état sur Napoléon, le directoire, le consulat, l’empire et la restauration* (Brussels: Auguste Wahlen and H. Tarlier, 1829), 3: 23.

opportunity presented itself quickly when Revolutionary cleric abbé Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, the ringleader of a conspiracy to overthrow the Directory, approached the general about the possibility of working together.³⁵ Eager to participate, Napoleon began scheming alongside the abbé and Roger Ducos and quickly proved more power-hungry than Sieyès had anticipated or desired. The first step the trio needed to accomplish was ensuring the support of certain high-ranking government officials. Joseph Fouché, the recently appointed minister of police, made it clear that he would neither inform the Directory nor allow his subordinates to put down the plot. Such duplicitous actions had been—and remained—part of Fouché’s ingenious repertoire. He often involved himself in schemes, sometimes ignoring them until they concluded on their own and other times thwarting them in their infancy, depending on whether he felt they could benefit him personally.³⁶ As such, “French historians, no matter whether Royalist, republican, or Bonapartist—one and all spit venom as soon as his name comes up for discussion.”³⁷

Support for the plot was even easier to gain from the President of the Council of Five Hundred, as Napoleon’s younger brother, Lucien, currently held the position.³⁸ Gaining the

³⁵ Napoleon was Sieyès’ third choice. His first, Barthélemy Catherine Joubert had recently died during the Battle of Novi on 15 August 1799. His second choice, Jean Victor Marie Moreau, agreed that Sieyès’ plot was necessary, but declined to play as large a role as he was offered. His decision ultimately haunted him, as he resented the power and prestige that Napoleon gained through his role in the events of 18 Brumaire and beyond.

³⁶ Illustrating Fouché’s ability and willingness to serve any regime as long as it benefitted him personally is the fact that he served as minister of police under the Directory, the Consulate, the Empire (including during the Hundred Days), and the restoration of Louis XVIII. He served 20 July 1799 – 15 September 1802, 10 July 1804 – 2 June 1810, 21 March 1815 – 23 June 1815, 9 July 1815 – 25 September 1815.

³⁷ Stefan Zweig, *Joseph Fouché: Bildnis eines politischen Menschen* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1929), translated by Eden and Cedar Paul as *Joseph Fouché: The Portrait of a Politician* (New York: Viking Press, 1930), xiii.

³⁸ Despite Lucien’s earlier admonition of Napoleon for his selfish and ambitious ways, he supported the conspiracy that overthrew the government he personally led. This reversal of opinion illustrates that he, too, had aspirations, which he hoped to achieve through his brother’s success.

cooperation of the assembly's members required more work. The conspirators expected them to resist relinquishing power, especially when asked to bestow it upon a man whom many mistrusted and disliked. While Sieyès knew that he had the support of the majority of the Council of Ancients, he could not risk the plan going awry. To secure the desired outcome, he, Ducos, and Bonaparte developed an elaborate story centered on a fictional plot. Upon hearing that Jacobin dissenters were prepared to “strike their daggers against the representatives of the nation,” the Council of Ancients passed two frantic decrees.³⁹ First, it relocated all future gatherings to a more secure and defensible meeting place at the palace of Saint-Cloud just outside the capital. Second, and more important for the conspiring trio, it placed control of the military troops garrisoned in Paris in Bonaparte's hands. The stage was set.

On 18 Brumaire VIII (9 November 1799), Napoleon directed his troops as they provided “protection” for the government's move to Saint-Cloud. By the time the Councilors realized that the supposed Jacobin plot was a sham, they found themselves surrounded by a force of over 6,000 under the leadership of a man who they now knew was a co-author of their present circumstance. Once settled in separate meeting rooms, the Five Hundred undertook to swear allegiance to the Constitution, while the Ancients suggested the appointment of a new Directory. Upon overhearing the Ancients' proposal, an impatient Napoleon took matters into his own hands. He burst upon them and began bungling his way through what was arguably the worst speech of his life. How dare the Councilors oppose him, he cried, “remember that I walk accompanied by the god of war and the god of luck!”⁴⁰ Growing confused and flustered, Napoleon retreated to the order and safety of his troops outside. He had little time to pull

³⁹ Christopher Hibbert, *Days of the French Revolution* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 302.

⁴⁰ McLynn, *Napoleon*, 217.

himself back together, however, as an urgent note from Fouché and Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord alerted him that the moment to strike a deathblow to the current regime was now or never. Several Jacobin generals were supposedly trying to break the loyalty of his troops outside the palace. Composing himself as much as possible, he made his way to the Orangerie to try his hand at addressing the Council of Five Hundred. While the Ancients had damaged his ego, the Five Hundred seemed determined to damage him physically. Councilors went mad, threw chairs at the intruder and his guards, and called for their deaths. With everything deviating disastrously from plan, Lucien stepped in to salvage his elder brother's botched efforts. He announced to the troops his version of the situation in the meeting room: "The immense majority of the council is now subdued by the terror of some representatives, armed with poignards . . . I declare to you that those audacious assassins . . . have threatened with an outlawry the very general entrusted with the wise measures of that council . . . Those assassins are not representatives of the people, but *representatives of the poignard*."⁴¹ After initial hesitation, the soldiers rushed in, causing the Councilors to flee in fear. Finally, the conspirators could initiate the plan for their new regime. Under the direction of Sieyès and Ducos, the Ancients announced the establishment of a provisional government headed by the three plotters themselves. The trio instituted, through overtly illegal means, France's fifth regime since 1789.

Disappointed and disinterested in politics after having their hopes dashed numerous times by the regimes of the Revolution, the majority of Frenchmen cared not that the new Consular

⁴¹ Barry Edward O'Meara, *Memoirs of the Military and Political Life of Napoleon Bonaparte, from His Origin, to His Death on the Rock of St. Helena: Comprising a Just Outline of His Splendid and Unexampled Military Career, from His First Entering the Regiment La Fere as Lieutenant, to Its Tremendous Termination at the Battle of Waterloo; A Detailed View of His Extraordinary Return to France from Elba, and the Events of His Ensuing Reign of 100 Days* (Hartford, UK: Chauncey Goodrich, 1822), 165-166.

government emerged from purely fraudulent means. Every passing year had brought new political actors to the forefront, new governments taking control, and new promises of peace and prosperity. Unfortunately, no one had delivered the expected benefits. With the declaration of the latest regime, the common people immediately hailed Napoleon as a hero. They believed he would deliver them from their daily struggles, just as he delivered them from the hands of their enemies on the battlefield. Citizens who had retained their political passions—monarchists and Republicans alike—were not so convinced.

Initially, two committees of twenty-five men each replaced the legislative bodies of the Directory. As the new assemblies began writing a new constitution for France, Sieyès, Ducos and Bonaparte guided the representatives, ensuring their own desired outcome. The Constitution of the Year VIII, adopted in December 1799, placed executive power in the hands of three Consuls, Napoleon Bonaparte, Jean-Jacques de Cambacérès, and Charles-François Lebrun. Theoretically, four assemblies existed to prevent corruption or abuse, but separately, each held no power, and combined, they held little. The First Consul proposed legislation to the Council of State, a thirty-to-forty member assembly, which then wrote up the bill. Next, the Tribune's one hundred representatives discussed it but did not have the right to vote on the proposal. The bill then moved to the three hundred men of the Legislature, who voted on it but had to do so without the benefit of discussion. If the proposal passed both assemblies, it fell to the sixty members of Senate to ensure its constitutionality. Guaranteeing that First Consul Bonaparte ultimately enacted any legislation that he wanted, despite the apparent system of checks and balances, Article 42 of the Constitution clearly explained the lesser role to be played by the Second and Third Consuls. They were to "have a consultative voice: they sign the register of these acts in order to attest their presence; and if they wish, they there record their opinions; after that the

decision of the First Consul suffices.”⁴² The conspiracy-born Consular government presented a Republican façade, but Bonaparte clearly intended to consolidate all real political power for himself.

As soon as the outcome of the events of 18 Brumaire became public knowledge, some citizens began to assert that Napoleon intended to destroy the liberties ushered in by the Revolution. Such allegations began in earnest with the plebiscite introducing the Constitution of the Year VIII in December 1799, less than a month after the overthrow of the Directory. One of the first outward signs of Napoleon’s less-than-Republican mindset was the proclamation he issued to the French people announcing the vote on the proposed Constitution. He explained that the new document and the government it created were “based on true principles of representative government, upon the sacred rights of property, of equality, and of liberty.”⁴³ He had placed two of the three traditionally accepted gains of the Revolution *after* the principle of property. Reminiscent of French values under the *ancien régime*, the idea that property would hold the same—or more—importance as equality and liberty was a conspicuous insult to Republicanism. Within the Constitution were several articles making it clear that Napoleon believed himself superior to his fellow Consuls and that he intended to be the only political figure with any true authority. Article 41 announced that only the “First Consul promulgates the laws.”⁴⁴ The same clause also explained that the First Consul alone held the power to appoint and dismiss “at will”

⁴² Napoleon Bonaparte, *Letters and Documents of Napoleon*, edited by John Eldred Howard (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 320.

⁴³ Albert H. Z. Carr, *Napoleon Speaks*, documents translated by Julia van Huele (New York: The Viking Press, 1941), 152-153.

⁴⁴ *Archives Nationales*, AE/I/29/4.

holders of nearly all of the nation's high-ranking positions.⁴⁵ Leading up to the plebiscite, a saying echoed throughout Paris: "What is there in the Constitution?—There is Bonaparte."⁴⁶

Although all male citizens over the age of twenty-one had the right to vote on the Constitution, many Republicans considered the process as unfair and unbalanced. Each commune had a register in which citizens simply signed their names, followed by a yes or no. Given the political retaliations enacted by previous Republican governments, some Frenchmen refused to vote, afraid of possible repercussions should they show support for the wrong side. Officials calmed the citizens' fears and persuaded them to participate by promising to burn the registers after the counting of the votes. Officially, the plebiscite's outcome totaled 3,011,007 votes to 1,562 in favor of the Constitution.⁴⁷ France had effectively voted itself into an autocracy with a thin Republican veneer.

⁴⁵ *Archives Nationales*, AE/1/29/4.

⁴⁶ Jean Tulard, *Napoléon: Ou, le mythe du sauveur* (Paris: Fayard, 1977), translated by Teresa Waugh as *Napoleon: The Myth of the Saviour* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), 81.

⁴⁷ On the surface, the results of the plebiscite approving the Constitution of the Year VIII imply the spontaneous renewal of the general population's interest in politics. With fewer than two million votes cast in the plebiscites held for the Constitutions of the Years I and III, results for the newest constitution totaling more than three million are entirely unrealistic. According to several historians, only slightly more than 1.5 million Frenchmen had actually voted in favor of the Constitution of the Year VIII. Lucien Bonaparte, now minister of the interior, effectively cast the remaining 1.5 million ballots. He arbitrarily included half a million votes of yes representing soldiers and sailors and then simply fabricated another one million fictitious ones. Of the votes that were actually cast, the majority of them did, in fact, support the new constitution. According to political theorist Carl Schmitt, the high proportion of "yes" votes resulted from political apathy among the majority of voters. He argues that the "majority of state citizens are generally inclined to leave political decisions to others and to respond to questions posed always such that the answer contains a minimum of decision." Because the general population desperately desired peace and order above all else, the voters said "yes" to the constitution, rather than "no," which would have brought continued uncertainty and confusion. Isser Woloch, *Napoleon and His Collaborators: The Making of a Dictatorship* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001), 94. Louis Bergeron, *L'Épisode napoléonien, aspects intérieurs: 1799-1815* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), 96. Carl Schmitt, *Verfassungslehre* (Munich: Duncker and Humblot, 1928), translated and edited by Jeffrey Seitzer as *Constitutional Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 134.

Napoleon immediately disappointed Republicans as he began to tug at the veil covering his true political aspirations. The very day after overthrowing the Directory, he had expressed his intention of censoring the press, violating one of the key freedoms established during the Revolution. To justify these actions, he explained, “If I give free reign to the press, I will not remain in power three months.”⁴⁸ On 17 January 1800, Napoleon imposed harsh regulations on the nation’s publications, reducing Paris’ seventy-three newspapers to thirteen. Only a month later, he significantly reduced the direct influence citizens had on the government through the Law of 28 Pluviôse VIII (17 February 1800). The new law removed the right to elect representatives directly. Instead, an elaborate system of elections allowed the population to create a list of men from which the Senate chose members to serve in the Tribune and Legislature. Such a step did not detract from the support Napoleon enjoyed from the general public, but it did strengthen the belief held by Republicans and monarchists alike that France was returning to an autocracy.

With every passing day, Napoleon’s Republican opponents believed him more and more dangerous: a man working against the liberties gained during the chaos of the Revolution, a man intent upon destroying the citizens’ right to participate in the government, a man who wanted to return to the past by making himself France’s supreme leader. While such prospects prompted fears among Republicans, they gave monarchists glimmers of hope that their own political goal could come to fruition.

Recognizing Napoleon’s efforts to centralize power in himself, monarchists believed that citizens would begin to reject the idea of a Republican system and reacclimatize to rule by one individual. They hoped that the First Consul would willingly allow, and even support, a

⁴⁸ Ernest D’Hauterive, *Napoléon et sa police* (Paris: Flammarion, 1943), 143.

Bourbon restoration. The future Louis XVIII, optimistic—more likely naïve—about the chance of such a transition, wrote himself to the First Consul on 20 February 1800 to explore the possibility.⁴⁹ Not intending to surrender power to the hopeful monarch—or to anyone else for that matter—Napoleon replied: “You must not hope for your return to France; you would have to walk over one hundred thousand corpses. Sacrifice your interest to the peace and happiness of France; history will not overlook you.”⁵⁰ Although he had verbally crushed the Bourbon’s hope of reclaiming the nation, Napoleon had not done so out of any Republican proclivities. Had a representative from any of the nation’s Republican groups presented him with a similar request, he would have responded in the same fashion: in his own best interest.

Napoleon recognized that making peace—or pretending to—would strengthen his grip on political control in France. Understanding that the populace wanted an end to the wars, he took as one of his first tasks making overtures of peace to his military opponents. Pretending to entertain diplomatic means to ending current military aggressions, he wrote to both George III of England and Emperor Francis I of Austria on Christmas Day 1799, announcing France’s new government. With his new authority, he claimed to seek a cessation of hostilities “on the basis of the *status quo*.”⁵¹ In his letter to Francis I, he declared that his primary interest was “to prevent the shedding of blood.”⁵² On the same day, however, Napoleon revealed his hypocrisy as he issued a proclamation to the troops exclaiming: “Soldiers! It is no longer necessary to defend your frontiers; it is necessary to invade enemy States.”⁵³

⁴⁹ *Archives Nationales*, AE/I/13/8/3.

⁵⁰ Martyn Lyons, *Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 131.

⁵¹ James Marshall-Cornwall, *Napoleon as Military Commander* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 95.

⁵² Bonaparte, *Letters and Documents*, 327.

⁵³ Napoleon Bonaparte, *Correspondance de Napoléon I^{er}* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1858-1870), 6: 38.

Another issue Napoleon needed to tackle quickly, for his own interests and those of the nation, was the religious strife that had plagued France since the early days of the Revolution. Implementing the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in summer 1790 changed entirely the relationship between France and the Catholic Church, as well as the relationship between citizens and their Revolution. The National Assembly had already nationalized Church lands and property in February 1790, one of the earliest steps toward weakening Catholicism's grip on the country. Fearing that the clergy were more loyal to the pope and Rome than to France, the representatives used the Civil Constitution to align religion with the Revolution. The new legislation tasked the State with paying the clergy, increasing the likelihood of support for the movement.⁵⁴ If the Church was no longer responsible for paying them, they would have to back the Revolution in order to get their funding. Many of the low-ranking clergymen, such as priests, supported the change in benefactor because the Church had paid them irregularly and poorly for many years. The State was more likely to pay them on a consistent basis, and most received pay raises. The bishops generally saw their salaries slashed, however, giving them even less reason to support the legislation.⁵⁵

Although the legislation as a whole was controversial, one of the most offensive changes to those who opposed it was the process of appointing bishops and priests. Prior to the Civil Constitution, the pope had sole authority to name and place these clergymen as he saw fit—though often in consultation with the monarch. Under the new arrangement, “one will recognize

⁵⁴ *Archives Nationales*, AE/II/1185.

⁵⁵ The Civil Constitution provided specific information about what each position within the clergy would earn. Paris offered the highest pay rates. All cities of more than 50,000 people offered a lesser rate, and cities with smaller populations paid even less. According to Section 3, Article 3, Paris' bishop received 50,000 *livres*. Bishops in smaller cities received 20,000 *livres* and smaller communities only paid 12,000 *livres*. *Archives Nationales*, AE/II/1185.

only a single manner of providing to the dioceses and to the parishes, through the process of elections.”⁵⁶ The pope lost not only the power to choose who served as bishops or priests throughout France, but also the right to approve the assignments after the fact because the Civil Constitution specifically forbade newly elected bishops or priests from seeking his confirmation. These new clergymen were, however, instructed by the document to “write to [the pope] as the visible leader of the universal Church, as testimony to the unity of faith and of the harmony that he must maintain with him.”⁵⁷ The National Assembly viewed informing the pope of the new appointments as good manners, but it did not care to know his opinion on them.

The government wanted to be sure of the clergy’s support—and wanted a way to track anyone who opposed it. As such, the Civil Constitution included Section 2, Article 21, which required the clergymen to “take, in the presence of municipal officers, of the people and of the clergy, the solemn oath to look after with care the faithful of the diocese that was entrusted to him, to be loyal to the nation, to the law and to the King, and to maintain with all his power the constitution decreed by the National Assembly and accepted by the King.”⁵⁸ Although the National Assembly passed the legislation on 12 July 1790, few clergymen rushed to make the pledge of allegiance. The oath placed them in an uncomfortable situation. To make the pledge risked ostracism from the Church. On the other hand, not to take the oath, meant estrangement from the country.

With few oaths sworn, the National Assembly hastened the process. On 27 November 1790, the government declared that bishops and priests had eight days to make the pledge. Tallies of who took the oath vary, but the majority of low-ranking clergymen, such as local

⁵⁶ *Archives Nationales*, AE/II/1185.

⁵⁷ *Archives Nationales*, AE/II/1185.

⁵⁸ *Archives Nationales*, AE/II/1185.

priests, swore their allegiance to the nation. Most of the nation's bishops declined to accept the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.⁵⁹ Even the ecclesiastical members of the Assembly largely declined to take the oath. Having already written a paper criticizing the legislation, Honoré Gabriel Riquetti, the Count of Mirabeau delivered his work as the Ecclesiastical Committee's official response. The opinion was clear and immediately explained: "On all sides the civil constitution of the clergy, decreed by your representatives, is denounced, as rendering unnatural the Divine organization of the Christian Church, and incapable of subsisting with the principles consecrated by ecclesiastical antiquity."⁶⁰

In April 1791, Pope Pius VI finally published his thoughts on the Civil Constitution. Thoroughly condemning it, he disputed the very idea that any nation had the authority to tamper with the organization of the Church. Just as the National Assembly had done, the pope ordered action within a certain deadline. Any clergyman who failed within forty days to renounce the oath he took to France and its government would find his actions viewed "as schismatic, null, void, and liable to severe censures."⁶¹ Pius VI also threatened excommunication for anyone who persisted in supporting the Revolution's attack on religion.

⁵⁹ One account explains that only seven of 160 French bishops, one-third of the clergymen serving in the Assembly, and approximately half of the clergy in general took the oath. Another account, from an obviously pro-Catholic source, states that 70 of the 300 ecclesiastical members of the Assembly and four of 135 bishops took the oath. Of the low-ranking clergymen, "the great majority, at least fifty out of sixty thousand, refused to take the oath." Despite numerous accounts to the contrary, the pro-Catholic work concludes "nearly the whole French episcopate and the great majority of the secular clergy, proved true in the hour of trial." John Vidmar, *The Catholic Church through the Ages: A History* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005), 270. Joseph Épiphané Darras, *A General History of the Catholic Church from the Commencement of the Christian Era until the Present Time* (New York: P. O'Shea, 1866), 531.

⁶⁰ Honoré Gabriel Riquetti, *An Address on the Civil Constitution of the Clergy Presented by the Ecclesiastical Committee to the National Assembly, and Delivered by Mr. Mirabeau, 14th January, 1791*, translated by A. W. H. (London: W. Day, 1791), 3-4.

⁶¹ J. F. MacLear, ed., *Church and State in the Modern Age: A Documentary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 86.

The adoption of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was the decision that resulted in France's deepest Revolutionary scar. In addition to the rupture between the Church and its clergymen, the legislation caused significant mistrust and resentment among the nation's peasants. At the time, peasants relied heavily on their local priests not only for information about what was happening in the region and country but also for guidance. The Church informed the people about what was right and what was wrong. If the Church thought the Revolution was leading the nation down the wrong path, who were the peasants to think differently? Many of them felt that the Church held a higher station than any temporal power and that no one had the right to dictate to it. It was the National Assembly's insistence on regulating the Church that had created a counterrevolutionary tendency among non-nobles, many of whom now supported the monarchy, even if they had believed in Republicanism earlier.

Knowing he needed to heal this wound between the nation and the Church, Napoleon sought a truce with the new pope, Pius VII after the implementation of the Consular government.⁶² Although opinions on the First Consul's motivation differ, it is certain that he did not act out of any genuine religious belief. As with many of his political decisions, he acted in his own personal interest. Napoleon expected to enhance his already strong image among the general population by resolving the conflict. He also believed he could "advance internal stability, and subvert royalism" by working to resolve the schism with the Church.⁶³ For this own part, Pius VII could hardly reject negotiating with Napoleon "because he feared, after a

⁶² Pius VI died on 29 August 1799, only a few months before Napoleon's political rise to power began. His successor, Pius VII had the unenviable task of attempting to restore the Church's standing under Napoleon's rule.

⁶³ MacLear, *Church and State*, 95.

century of skepticism and a decade of revolution, that the Church in France was on the verge of being dissolved.”⁶⁴

Papal representatives and Napoleon’s officials devised ten versions of the Concordat before all parties involved accepted the agreement. One of the most contentious points to iron out was the status of Catholicism within France. The papacy wanted it declared the nation’s official religion, but Napoleon—and others—strongly rejected the proposal. Instead, the Concordat recognized Catholicism as “the religion of the great majority of French citizens.”⁶⁵ In order to achieve the clause he wanted, Napoleon and the other Consuls had to agree “personally to make a ‘private confession’ of Catholicism.”⁶⁶ The clause caused little discomfort for the nation, as the wording purposefully acknowledged the role Catholicism played in the country without giving it any more authority than any other religion. On the other hand, the papacy saw its foothold in France strengthened but certainly not restored to its pre-Civil Constitution status.

Aware of the divisions caused by the Civil Constitution, Napoleon was unsure of the loyalty of the bishops currently serving. He insisted that each of them “resign and await reappointment” because he believed “the émigrés and non-jurors [were] royalists, while the Constitutional bishops were suspected of being republicans and liberals.”⁶⁷ Just as the Civil Constitution resulted in refractory clergymen, so too did the Concordat. Thirty-eight bishops refused to resign their positions, disobeying the pope’s order to conform to the new agreement. They saw the order to relinquish their posts as a poor reward for their loyal service to the papacy.

⁶⁴ Robert B. Holtman, *The Napoleonic Revolution* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1967), 124.

⁶⁵ *Archives Nationales*, AE/II/2213.

⁶⁶ Holtman, *Napoleonic Revolution*, 129.

⁶⁷ William Roberts, “Napoleon, the Consulate of 1801, and Its Consequences,” in *Controversial Concordats: The Vatican’s Relations with Napoleon, Mussolini, and Hitler*, edited by Frank J. Coppa (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 44, 47.

Already intending his government to walk a narrow line between monarchy and republic, Napoleon could reinstate the Catholic Church with a blank slate, ensuring that everyone at the head of the bishoprics was suitable to him.

The First Consul also required the addition of a clause at the end of each religious service to strengthen support for himself and his regime. Because the pope agreed to the Concordat, the addition of the new phrase, “*Domine, salvam fac Republicam; Domine, salvos fac Consules,*” (“Lord, save the Republic; Lord, save the Consuls”) implied that the papacy, its bishops and priests fully backed the Consular government.⁶⁸ Given that the masses looked to the religious leaders for guidance in all things, anyone who doubted the authority of the latest regime would now have his fears put at ease. Another clause in the Concordat that relieved anxiety among France’s general population called for the Church to acknowledge the permanence of the nationalization of its lands.⁶⁹ No longer having to fear the loss of their property or any revenues gained by it, the new landowners were free to enjoy their possessions and their religion without fearing a conflict of interest.

The Civil Constitution of 1790 had caused a schism between France and the Catholic Church, but Napoleon understood that repairing the relationship would lead to some tensions as well. Revolutionaries who had fought to weaken religion—and even to remove it completely at some points—resented its reinstatement. The hierarchical nature of the Church defied the principle of equality and placed France’s citizens on its lowest rung. Causing even more skepticism was the longstanding and close relationship between the Church and monarchical

⁶⁸ *Archives Nationales*, AE/II/2213.

⁶⁹ *Archives Nationales*, AE/II/2213.

governments, which continued despite France's new political path. If the papacy backed Europe's monarchies, which backed the Bourbons, how could it also support France's republic?

Revolutionaries were not the only people who dreaded and resented the Concordat. Papal support of the Consular government brought with it a certain level of legitimacy. Monarchists feared that an agreement between the pope and France would cost them one of their strongest and most powerful allies. With the Church constantly reminding its congregations of its support for the Consular government, the monarchists would have a harder time convincing the general population of France that the Bourbons were, in fact, the rightful rulers of France.

Napoleon had plenty of opponents, but the lower classes who tended not to be politically inclined adored him. Events of the Revolution had shown Napoleon the power wielded by the lower classes, and he knew it was in his best interest to guide that force. He correctly understood that the stability of his regime depended not solely on the military victories he could earn but also on the level of prosperity and comfort of the masses. Within two months of the Consulate's creation, living conditions had vastly improved over those experienced during the previous decade. Noting the quick progress, Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette remarked, "you know how many beggars there were We see no more of them. The peasants are richer, the land better tilled, the women better clad."⁷⁰ Although the mediocre harvest of 1799 had caused the First Consul some alarm, a decrease in bread prices conveniently coincided with his victory at the Battle of Marengo in June 1800. Grateful for such a fantastic victory and lowered bread prices, the public openly adored their new leader.

Yet poor economic conditions struck France again in spring 1801, threatening that adoration. Given the trouble the masses had caused at various points during the Revolution,

⁷⁰ Carr, *Napoleon Speaks*, 158.

Napoleon once stated, “I fear insurrections based on a lack of bread; I should fear less a battle of 200,000 men.”⁷¹ Concerned that his regime could not withstand widespread bread riots, Napoleon ordered the opening of soup kitchens throughout the capital to help feed the poor. He also issued a command to purchase all possible grain from Dutch and English ports for immediate shipment to Le Havre. The promptness with which Napoleon acted successfully calmed French fears within three weeks. Having long since proven his abilities on the battlefield, the First Consul now displayed similar talents in economic affairs. The handling of the nation’s finances was “one of the triumphs of Napoleon’s career and an achievement that has had a lasting impact.”⁷²

Despite only 167,000 francs in the coffers on 18 Brumaire, Napoleon managed to balance the nation’s budget at 500 million francs by 1802. One of the benefits of widespread military occupation was the ability to extract funds from the conquered territories. These contributions helped offset the cost of the military engagements themselves, which accounted for “half to three fourths of the total budget.”⁷³ Wanting to increase the rate at which citizens paid their taxes, Napoleon redesigned many of the tax codes to make most citizens unaware of how much of their money they were sacrificing to the government. His efforts were so successful that during his reign, Frenchmen “came closer to meeting their obligations than at any earlier time or most later times.”⁷⁴ Although he took some traditional steps to achieve the balance, Napoleon also implemented some creative practices as well. In 1800, he declared a partial bankruptcy in order to clear the market of some of the Revolutionary paper money in circulation. The First Consul

⁷¹ Holtman, *Napoleonic Revolution*, 114.

⁷² Holtman, *Napoleonic Revolution*, 99.

⁷³ Holtman, *Napoleonic Revolution*, 100.

⁷⁴ Holtman, *Napoleonic Revolution*, 101.

also issued a proclamation on 21 March 1801, despite the Tribunalate's veto of it, arbitrarily reducing the debt by 73 million francs simply by his fiat.⁷⁵ Another measure saw the purchases made on credit by the military from various contractors spontaneously absolved.

Balancing the budget was a strong step toward improving the nation's finances as a whole, but doing so did not guarantee long-term financial stability.⁷⁶ To help achieve it, he began repaying government bonds in cash in accordance with a law passed on 11 April 1800, thereby immediately improving his popularity among the bourgeoisie. He also recognized that the creation of a national bank would help the nation overcome the recession of the Revolutionary era. French citizens mistrusted paper money after the failure of the Republican regimes to use it properly. To alleviate their concerns, Napoleon established the bank independently from the government. It functioned as a joint-stock company, where those with the largest number of shares were responsible for running it. Although the First Consul and many of his family members were stockholders, he did not exercise any direct control over the institution until 1806 when he began appointing its highest committee members directly. The creation of the Bank of France on 16 Nivôse VIII (6 January 1800) was one of Napoleon's most beneficial fiscal accomplishments.

Another lasting financial achievement was his institution of new legal tender on 7 Germinal XI (27 March 1803). This law established a clearly defined and standardized currency based on a ratio of 15.5 to 1 between gold and silver.⁷⁷ The Germinal franc was the first tender in French history whose face value truly equaled its real value. Demonstrating the stability of

⁷⁵ Roger Dufraisse, *Napoléon* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1987), translated by Steven Englund as *Napoleon* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992), 55.

⁷⁶ Although he managed to balance the budget shortly after taking political control, Napoleon rarely managed to do so later in his reign.

⁷⁷ The Germinal franc was worth .322 grams of gold. Holtman, *Napoleonic Revolution*, 103.

the currency, as well as that of the nation's finances in general under Napoleon's leadership, was the fact that the value of the Germinal franc held firm from its creation until the eve of World War I in 1914.

Nearly every decision Napoleon made early in his political career centered on strengthening his grasp on control or on solidifying support among the nation's lower classes. Because of his intense focus on the politically apathetic general population, he managed to alienate members from both sides of France's politically active spectrum within the first year of holding office. He had also managed, however, to employ people from both sides in high-ranking military and political positions. Hoping to weaken ties to factions and to strengthen faith in his own government, Napoleon simultaneously encouraged and disheartened men of all ideologies. He feared having to share power with anyone else, something he considered the inevitable outcome of associating himself with any particular group. The events of the French Revolution had proven to him that competing factions undermined whatever regime happened to be in power at the time. Wanting to create a government above such elements, Napoleon explained to his brother Joseph: "I have composed my Council of State of ex-members of the Constituent Assembly, of moderates, Feuillants, Royalists, Jacobins I am national: I like honest men of all colours."⁷⁸

In addition to the negotiation with the Catholic Church, Napoleon also arranged another controversial compromise, this time with the nobles who had fled France during the Revolution. Thousands of these émigrés had seen their lands confiscated, divided, and even sold as national property. Numerous laws during the Revolution forbade them from returning to their homeland, though by no means all of them had actively taken up arms against the Revolution. After months

⁷⁸ Felix Markham, *Napoleon* (New York: Signet, 1963), 82.

of negotiations among Napoleon, the two other Consuls, and the Senate, the Consulate announced a general amnesty for émigrés on 26 April 1802. It permitted an unconditional return for all but approximately 1,000 émigrés considered to be active enemies of the Revolution and, therefore, of Napoleon.⁷⁹ Quickly, tens of thousands of these refugees returned to France. Many of them immediately took up positions in the military, government and other institutions, anxious to rejoin French society. Although they recognized that they stood no chance of reestablishing their feudal rights, some still hoped for a return to some semblance of their previous luxuries. The amnesty seemed, in fact, to offer such a hope, stating that while estates sold during the émigrés' absence would not be returned, estates that had not sold could be returned on a case-by-case basis. The wording of this particular clause was so bungled, however, that Napoleon ultimately annulled it. Few, if any émigrés recovered their lost lands, and none received reparations for their losses until the Bourbon restoration.

The abolition of feudal rights had been one of the greatest accomplishments of the Revolution. Everyone was equal before the law, without regard to title or wealth. When Napoleon proposed allowing the émigrés to return to France, even with the clause offering the return of any of their unsold property, the former members of the Third Estate took no issue. As long as the lands they had purchased would not be repossessed and the feudal privileges that had oppressed them for so long would not be reinstated, they cared not about the return of the refugees. There were hardly any incidents of hostilities toward the émigrés as they returned to the country.

⁷⁹ Napoleon had started paring down the list of émigrés since taking power on 18 Brumaire. According to some counts, he had removed 52,000 names within approximately a year. Dufraisse, *Napoléon*, 60.

As was generally the case, the lower classes viewed both of Napoleon's recent compromises positively, or at least indifferently. It was the remaining émigrés, monarchists and vehement Republicans who felt slighted—or even betrayed—by them. Illustrating the military's distaste for the Concordat was the response Napoleon received from General Antoine-Guillaume Delmas when asked what he thought of the Easter service. "It was a beautiful speech," he answered, "all that was missing were the 100,000 men who died to destroy what you have revived today."⁸⁰ Other generals refused to attend the service at all.

Although the Concordat did produce some disillusionment, a majority of the population remained more satisfied under Napoleon's regime than under any government installed since the Revolution began. The ratification of the Peace of Amiens between England and France on 25 March 1802 added to the First Consul's level of support. The British hoped, though in vain, that Napoleon would cease his efforts to expand French territory, satisfying himself with the borders he had already achieved. Although their government was reluctant, the British people demanded peace. French citizens too had longed for an end to a decade of nearly non-stop fighting. With his allies out of commission—the Dutch fleet suffered a devastating defeat in April 1801, and Russian Czar Paul I was assassinated the following month—Napoleon could not launch an invasion of England, an event about which he had fantasized since seizing power. In addition to inaugurating peace between the two countries, the treaty announced the return of prisoners and hostages taken by both sides and dictated that the United Kingdom return colonies previously belonging to nations involved in the peace—Britain maintained only Trinidad and Ceylon. France was to evacuate its positions in Naples and the Roman states, though the nation did gain

⁸⁰ Édouard Guillon, *Les Complots militaires sous le Consulat et l'Empire: D'après les documents inédits des Archives* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit & Cie., 1894), 8.

acknowledgement of its natural boundaries along the Alps and the Rhine River. For French citizens, the treaty also brought as a bonus lower taxes and conscription demands.

Although the majority of citizens were content with his reign, Napoleon was not unaware of his opponents' continued machinations designed to remove him from power, whether by assassination or otherwise. He was, however, nonchalant about the situation. He dedicated little of his time or energy to remedying the grievances his political opponents harbored. Arguably, these grievances were impossible to negotiate without relinquishing his position. Viewed simultaneously as having destroyed the republic and having usurped the Bourbon throne, Napoleon had no hope of winning politically-minded men to his side without sacrificing his own personal goals. Recognizing that there were no true Bonapartists, he focused his attention on those people whose loyalty he could count on, as long as daily conditions were favorable. He hoped to win enough support among the lower classes to ensure the stability of his regime, even if one of his political opponents managed to strike a severe blow.

Believing that the chaotic course of the Revolution had so inundated the nation with various ideologies that it was impossible for citizens to know which path was correct, he sought to reform the education system currently in place. Napoleon explained that as “long as one does not learn from childhood whether to be republican or monarchist, Catholic or nonreligious, etc., the State will not form a nation; it will rest on a vague and uncertain base; it will be constantly exposed to changes and disorders.”⁸¹ If no one took the time to explain the just and proper ways of society and politics, hostility and confusion would continue to plague the nation.

Wanting to establish conformity among the impressionable minds of those young who would eventually become his military and government officials, he replaced the Directory's

⁸¹ Bergeron, *L'épisode napoléonien*, 33.

secondary schools with his own more centralized ones—*lycées*—in May 1802. He exercised direct control over the schools' curriculum until 1808, when members of his Imperial University took over the task. Students studied basic subjects such as reading, history, and Latin until the age of twelve, when they separated into two categories: the elite who would pursue military careers and the others destined for civilian positions. In either case, all students wore uniforms and participated in drills and physical training, illustrating the importance of military affairs in Napoleonic France. By 1805, the Emperor had founded 39 *lycées* and 1,083 secondary schools, far surpassing the number established by any previous regime.⁸² Given his belief in providing opportunities based on merit rather than upbringing or heritage, Napoleon created 2,500 scholarships to assist boys of lesser means obtain the education more readily available to the wealthy. To guarantee a certain level of competency among those who completed their education, Napoleon established the baccalaureate examination in 1809, a system still in place today. His education system produced noticeable results, raising literacy from 37 percent to 54 percent among men and from 27 percent to over 35 percent among women.⁸³

With peace among the European nations and social and economic conditions better than in previous years, Napoleon recognized that opportunity had presented itself for him to solidify his regime even further. Taking advantage of the Senators' offer in summer 1802 to extend his term as Consul to ten years, he cleverly suggested a plebiscite to ask the nation whether he should serve in the position for life. Although they agreed to the vote, many of the Senators were alarmed. Believing the removal of the term limit to be a step toward revoking the involvement of the populace in deciding its leaders, one of the most important achievements of

⁸² Susan P. Conner, *The Age of Napoleon* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 59.

⁸³ Sutherland, *France, 1789-1815*, 369.

the Revolution, they considered the transition too dramatic and abrupt. The French people as a whole, however, cared little for the memory of the Revolution. For them, it called up memories of uncertainty, fear, and chaos. Napoleon had brought them financial stability and salvation from war and constant political upheaval. Naming him First Consul for life ensured, in the people's opinion, the continued stability of their daily lives. It was an added bonus if it brought the same for the nation on its larger political scale.

While the voting process for the plebiscite was free from direct tampering, voters certainly felt pressured to approve the proposed change. The typical adult male continued to fear retaliation for casting the wrong vote, as they were required to sign their names in a register before voting. Leaving no room to question which was the right choice, some military officials threatened their men. One general, gathering his men outside a voting center, stated blatantly: "You are free to hold your own opinion; nevertheless, I must warn you that the first man not to vote for the Consulate for life will be shot in front of the regiment."⁸⁴ The official results of the plebiscite tallied 3,568,885 in favor, a mere 8,374 opposed, and the Senate ratified the Constitution of the Year X, including Napoleon's new title, before knowing the outcome.⁸⁵

Although he was not yet ready to unveil his true imperial intentions, Napoleon had already succeeded in claiming all real political power while leaving to the other Consuls and Senators just enough to maintain the charade of Republicanism. His ruse did not convince everyone. True Republicans grew more agitated by the Consul's consolidation of authority, and Royalists were determined to see the Bourbons restored to the same throne of France that Napoleon seemed anxious to claim for himself.

⁸⁴ McLynn, *Napoleon*, 254.

⁸⁵ Herold, *Age of Napoleon*, 138.

Napoleon's hold on power depended greatly on loyalty, a commodity he was willing to purchase when needed. Despite the Revolution's promise of equality—and the steps it had made toward it—Napoleon knew that individuals enjoyed striving to rise above others. Running the risk of criticism for returning to practices of the *ancien régime*, he created the Legion of Honor on 29 Floréal Year X (19 May 1802).⁸⁶ Admission depended on ability, talent, and service, whether military or civilian. The suggestion faced significant disapproval on the ground that the organization would serve no purpose other than distributing useless honorific trinkets and promoting inequality. To such claims, Napoleon retorted, “it is by baubles alone that men are led.”⁸⁷ Pure and complete equality was not something that the Consul believed Frenchmen truly wanted. He saw it as something “they would gladly renounce . . . if everyone could entertain the hope of rising to the top.”⁸⁸ The Legion had five levels, each providing a different amount of prestige and reward.⁸⁹ Although the Legion of Honor was open to civilians, an overwhelming majority of its members were military men, a clear sign of its inherent inequality. Among the roughly 4,000 civilians—compared to nearly 32,000 soldiers—welcomed into the fold between 1802 and 1814, most of them held high-ranking government positions. Realizing the power behind man's desire for honor and recognition, Napoleon used the Legion not only to reward the faithful but to buy the loyalty of the unfaithful. On 25 Prairial XII (14 June 1804), for example, in a blatant effort to purchase a disgruntled general's devotion to the Consulate, Napoleon

⁸⁶ *Archives Nationales*, AE/II/2878.

⁸⁷ McLynn, *Napoleon*, 260.

⁸⁸ Markham, *Napoleon*, 95.

⁸⁹ The pay rate of the highest position, Grand Chancellor, is unknown at the time of the Legion's creation. The other ranks, along with their pay rates, were as follows: Grand Officer, 5,000 francs, Commanders, 2,000 francs, Officers, 1,000 francs and Legionnaires, 250 francs. Victor Duruy, *Histoire de France* (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie., 1883), 2: 584n1.

nominated Claude-François de Malet to the Legion with the rank of Commander.⁹⁰ Malet promptly responded in a letter humbly acknowledging the distinction and declaring his unshakable “love of country and liberty.”⁹¹ Bonaparte learned soon enough, however, that he had merely succeeded in renting, not buying, the general’s loyalty.

Positions in the Legion of Honor were not the only rewards Napoleon used in his efforts to purchase the loyalty of discontented citizens. On occasion, the attempt was even more obvious, as the First Consul offered military or political positions and large sums of money. In early 1801, Napoleon granted safe passage for Georges Cadoudal, a known *chouan* loosely associated with the infernal machine plot of 1800, to travel to Paris for a meeting between the two men. Although genuinely tempted by the offer of a generalship in the military, the conspirator ultimately declined. He also refused the offer of a yearly income of 100,000 livres. Instead, he held fast to his ideologies, leaving the meeting without changing his allegiances. He returned to England where he continued working with the Bourbons to overthrow the First Consul.

The severity of the plots against him, coming from both political camps, often prompted Napoleon to jump to rash and ill-informed conclusions. After the infernal machine plot, the First Consul used the Republican-based attempt against his life at the Theatre of the Republic and of the Arts the previous October as proof of the guilty party. Even as contradictory evidence surfaced, Napoleon held to his initial assumption. He produced a list containing over 130 names

⁹⁰ *Archives Nationales*, AF/IV/1037, document 58.

⁹¹ Émile Marco de Saint-Hilaire, *Histoire des conspirations et attentats contre le gouvernement et la personne de Napoléon* (Paris: Charles Fellens, 1847), 332.

of alleged Republican conspirators, each of whom ultimately found himself deported to the Seychelles or Cayenne.⁹²

Cadoudal's plot against Napoleon in 1804 prompted even more serious conclusions in Napoleon's mind. Alarmed that the royal family itself had supported the effort, the First Consul immediately began searching for the prince who would supposedly lead a movement against his regime in Paris. He demanded the seizure of Louis-Antoine-Henri de Bourbon, Duke d'Enghien, from Ettenheim, a small German town near the border with France. The Duke was brought to Vincennes château in Paris in March to defend himself before a hastily formed military commission that had already determined a verdict of guilty. The tribunal announced that he faced several charges: bearing arms against the French people, offering his services to the English, being an enemy of France, harboring British agents and helping them to spy in France, trying to spark rebellions in Strasbourg, leading a corps of émigrés on the French border, and, finally, spearheading a plot to overthrow the Consular government. Admitting to having taken up arms against Revolutionary France, he was audacious enough to explain that had he not done so, he would not have been able to face himself. He found the other charges positively ludicrous and vehemently denied being involved in any such activities. The commission found him guilty, and sentenced him to an immediate death. With no means of appealing the decision, he was lost. Taken to the courtyard where a firing squad and freshly dug grave were waiting, Enghien, having had no ties to Cadoudal or his plot, met with death.

Napoleon felt neither guilt nor remorse for his actions. When asked about the decision to execute Enghien, he replied, "Under similar circumstances today, I would do the same thing all over again. After all, am I simply some miserable dog one can kill in the street with impunity,

⁹² *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6271.

while my assassins are held sacrosanct? When they attack my person, I return blow for blow.”⁹³ While the murder produced no lasting effect on Napoleon himself, the Bourbons and other European monarchs considered it especially egregious. Enghien’s execution marked the definitive break between Napoleon and the Bourbons, illustrating clearly that the First Consul had no intention of allowing the restoration of the monarchy. Despite the violence enacted against one of their own, the monarchs failed to take any further substantive action against Napoleon or his regime. Cadoudal’s failed attempt marked the last conspiratorial effort in the Royalist camp. By contrast, Revolutionaries drew encouragement from the murder, noting that the “likelihood of a compromise between himself [Napoleon] and the *ancien régime*, between himself and the Europe of the kings, was weaker than ever.”⁹⁴

Neither the fates of Cadoudal and his accomplices nor the execution of the Duke d’Enghien roused the French public against Napoleon or his regime. Rather than react negatively to the recent executions, the French public embraced their leader even more closely. Napoleon enjoyed a burst of support in response to news of Cadoudal’s latest attempt against him in 1804. Addressing the Senate about the anger and fear the plot had provoked in the public, Napoleon explained that such attempts caused him no personal fear. His only worry concerned “the situation in which this great people would have found itself today had the recent attempt succeeded.”⁹⁵ To resolve the issue, the Senators in May 1804, under obvious pressure, suggested that Napoleon take the title of Emperor, rendering the regime hereditary and supposedly more stable. Although the suggestion disheartened some members, only one Senator, Lazare Carnot,

⁹³ Alan Schom, *Napoleon Bonaparte* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998), 346.

⁹⁴ François Furet, *The French Revolution, 1770-1814* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 238.

⁹⁵ Tulard, *Napoleon*, 127.

actively spoke against the proposal and voted no. On 18 May, the Senators approved the transition. Wanting to preserve the façade of a Republican government to the last minute, Napoleon ordered a plebiscite, stating that he would not accept the position if it were not the will of the people. Six months later, French male citizens voted whether they supported his accession to Emperor, a position that would pass, if he had no legitimate children of his own, to a brother, Joseph or Louis Bonaparte.⁹⁶ The result, announced on 6 November 1804, was a victory for Napoleon: 3,572,329 to 2,569.⁹⁷ Such an outcome was—and is—a “virtual statistical impossibility,” implying that 99.9993 percent of Frenchmen voted in favor of the proposition.⁹⁸ Regardless of apparently distorted numbers, the public supported the change overwhelmingly. Anyone of dissimilar political ideology, including the monarchs of other European nations, grew enraged at the prospect of a French emperor. Nevertheless, Napoleon’s coronation took place on 2 December 1804 at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

The Bourbons and Europe’s other monarchs had, in fact, never accepted as legitimate any of the governments born out of the Revolution. They considered Napoleon’s latest accomplishment an affront to ideological sensibilities, a sentiment illustrated by their absence from the coronation ceremony. No monarch personally attended the event, and most refused even to send a representative. One leader that Napoleon could not afford to have decline his invitation was Pope Pius VII. Napoleon believed that the papacy’s participation in the ceremony would give his regime an undeniable legitimacy. When his requests for the pope’s attendance went unanswered, the Emperor resorted to begging and even to threatening the Church.

⁹⁶ Napoleon had entertained the idea of adopting as his heir the son of his stepdaughter Hortense and her husband Louis, but the boy died before his fifth birthday. Markham, *Napoleon*, 186.

⁹⁷ *Bulletin des lois de l’Empire français*, Vol. 2: *Contenant les lois rendues depuis le 1^{er} Vendémiaire jusqu’au 30 Ventôse an XIII* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, an XIII), 77.

⁹⁸ Schom, *Napoleon*, 333.

Although he eventually agreed to participate, Pius VII did so reluctantly. After crowning himself Emperor and his wife, Josephine, Empress, Napoleon received yet another symbol of his power, this time from the pope. Pius VII explained that the imperial ring was “the sign of the Holy Faith, the proof of the strength and solidity of your empire, by means of which, as a result of its triumphant power, you will conquer your enemies and destroy heresies, on this imperial throne which Jesus the Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords in his eternal kingdom, affirms your reign with him.”⁹⁹

Both Napoleon and his opponents recognized the legitimacy granted to the imperial regime through the Church’s blessing, but their opinions regarding it differed. Rejoicing in his accomplishment, the new Emperor referred to himself as the “crowned representative of the Revolution triumphant,” while Royalists and other adversaries lamented the occasion as “the Revolution legitimized and even sanctified.”¹⁰⁰ For his part, Cadoudal—awaiting his execution—complained that he and his collaborators had overreached their goal: “we have done more than we hoped to do; we meant to give France a King, and we have given her an Emperor.”¹⁰¹

The former First Consul had finally removed the thin Republican veil under which he had hidden his intentions for so long, revealing a throne with laurel leaves and a golden “N.” Despite decreasing liberties, overturned Revolutionary gains, and nearly constant warfare—peace had lasted only fourteen months during the Consulate—the masses continued to support their leader. They continued to praise him as the savior of the Revolution, even after his taking the title of Emperor. An imperial official remarked, “they were among his warmest partisans, because he

⁹⁹ Schom, *Napoleon*, 348.

¹⁰⁰ Tulard, *Napoleon*, 130. Markham, *Napoleon*, 113.

¹⁰¹ Markham, *Napoleon*, 113.

reassured them against the return of tithes, feudal rights, the restitution of property to émigrés, and the oppression of the lords.”¹⁰² Republicans continuously denounced Napoleon as the executioner of Revolutionary gains, but they could not legitimately refute his accomplishments concerning the nation’s laws.

With the passage of the Civil Code (also known as the Code Napoleon) on 21 March 1804, the roughly 400 law codes of the *ancien régime* were no more.¹⁰³ The new code largely dismissed the previous laws because of their origin in hereditary privilege and religion. It forbade privilege based on birth, granted freedom of religion, and proclaimed that employment should go to the most qualified. Those responsible for the code’s wording took care to organize it rationally (rather than as a hodgepodge of seemingly unrelated laws) and to word it in an easily accessible manner. The Civil Code proclaimed equality before the law but also made clear that the husband/father was the head of the household. Although modern readers will not consider such a system representative of true equality, nowhere in Europe in the early 1800s did women enjoy the same rights as men. According to Napoleon’s law code, for example, a man could ask for a divorce if his wife committed adultery, but a woman could make the same request only if her husband was guilty of the same within the confines of their residence.

As Napoleon’s popularity continued to increase—even other nations appreciated the utility of his new law code—Republicans acknowledged that if they wanted to restore their preferred form of government, violence was the only answer. This recognition aside, the initial years of Napoleon’s reign as Emperor saw no significant attempts against his life, allowing him

¹⁰² Tulard, *Napoleon*, 188.

¹⁰³ Even after the Bourbons reestablished political control of France in 1815, parts of the Civil Code remained in effect.

to focus on social aspects of his realm in addition to his ever-present, but successful, military endeavors.

Napoleon's insistence on being present on the battlefields offered conspirators with their best opportunities for action. His opponents recognized the possibility that the Emperor might be injured or even killed during one of the conflicts. They could take advantage of the prospect, as well as the slow rate of communication between the battles and the capital. The horrible outcome of the Battle of Eylau in February 1807 seemed to provide a prime opportunity for acting against the Emperor.

The joint force of Prussia and Russia in the town of Eylau, less than thirty miles south of Königsberg, easily outnumbered Napoleon's own troops. His infantry was dwarfed 67,000 to 45,000, and his artillery pieces fell short 260 to 200. Casualties on the first day of fighting totaled roughly 4,000. The number of wounded quickly became the number of dead as most of the injured men, exposed to the excruciatingly cold temperature and heavy snowfall, did not survive the night. The second day of battle saw blinding blizzard conditions that rendered the bit of light provided by daybreak virtually useless.

As the Russians began making inroads on the French lines, Napoleon ordered a corps under Marshal Pierre Augereau to contain the Russian left flank. Delusional with fever and barely able to stand, Augereau was a horrendous choice. Growing increasingly disoriented as he crossed the marshy, pond-laden terrain, he unwittingly led his soldiers straight into the center of the Russian artillery line. With no difficulty or hesitation, the Russian gunners obliterated the Frenchmen. Of the nearly 15,000 soldiers who had obediently and confidently followed Augereau on the battlefield, only 2,000 lived to see another day.

While the annihilation of this corps dealt a devastating blow to French numbers and morale, the Russians nearly struck an even more catastrophic one that could have easily destroyed any hope for the survival of Napoleon's Empire. As the Emperor watched the battle unfold from a bell tower within Eylau, nearly 6,000 Russian troops headed straight for him. His own troops were all on the battlefield, leaving him with only his personal escort for protection. If the Russians could manage to capture—though they were just as likely to kill—the illustrious Napoleon Bonaparte, not only the battle but his reign would be over. His guards preferred to die rather than let that happen. And die they did. The Russians mercilessly mowed down the French, who literally sacrificed themselves as human shields for their Emperor. Their heroic efforts succeeded in slowing the enemy long enough to allow the arrival of two French battalions which repelled the attack completely.

As blood streamed across the frozen battlefield, Napoleon knew that he faced a desperate problem. The loss of life was devastating, though he could hide that fact easily enough. Rather than reporting the true figure estimated around 25,000, he admitted to the nation suffering fewer than 8,000 dead and wounded, a boldfaced lie when considering that Augereau's corps alone lost nearly 13,000. On the other hand, his troops had experienced the fighting for themselves and knew the truth. Haunted by a battle deemed a victory only because they survived, their morale was crashing, further aggravated by rough terrain, bad weather and hostile peasantry in the countryside. They asked themselves whether they would ever see France again.

Back in Paris, anyone with connections to high-ranking political or military officers received more honest reports of the catastrophe suffered at Eylau. Moved by this information, some who opposed the Empire began conspiring against Napoleon. Led by former Minister of War General Joseph Servan de Gerbey, a group of military officers, senators, and ministers in

Napoleon's own cabinet started discussions about how best to relieve France of its imperial burden. By the time they agreed on how to proceed and how their provisional government would function, news of Napoleon's resounding victory at the Battle of Friedland (14 June 1807) reached the capital. The group postponed their plot, expecting that a celebrating nation would be unlikely to support the overthrow of their victorious leader. Servan assured his supporters that another opportunity would present itself in time. He was right, but he did not live to see it. When he died on 10 May 1808, General Malet assumed control of the group and its conspiracy.

As Napoleon's imperial regime continued, thus did his decisions that infuriated Republicans. They had taken issue with the establishment of the Legion of Honor in May 1802, decrying its ranking system despite a membership based on talent and merit, rather than wealth or heritage. The honorary titles granted to its members notwithstanding, the Legion did not, in fact, constitute a new nobility. But the opposite was true when, in 1808, Napoleon created an imperial aristocracy which, disregarding any titles that had existed prior to the Revolution, depended instead on loyalty to the Emperor—or at least the appearance thereof—and financial affluence. Men who hoped to join the new nobility needed a personal fortune of at least 50,000 francs.¹⁰⁴ Over the next six years, Napoleon appointed 3,263 noblemen ranging from chevalier to prince. Although he reestablished an aristocracy, its composition differed greatly from its predecessor: only 22 percent of its members had held titles under the Bourbon monarchy, while 58 percent were modest bourgeois lawyers, doctors, and industrialists, and 20 percent were from lower levels of society. While Republicans considered the new hierarchy an affront to Revolutionary sensibilities, the majority of the nation hardly noticed it. Because the new

¹⁰⁴ The minimum fortune to join the new aristocracy was 50,000 francs, though the higher positions required significantly more wealth, with the highest requiring a four million franc personal fortune.

imperial nobility did not restore the rights and privileges of the *ancien régime*, it did not contradict the peasants' conception of Revolutionary accomplishments.

Several years of ruling without any significant threats against his life and favorable daily police reports announcing that “the multitude . . . loves the Emperor” eventually bolstered Napoleon’s confidence in the stability of his regime.¹⁰⁵ He explained to one of his officials, “we have acquired the right to think no man will make an attempt on Our life until Providence so wills it.”¹⁰⁶ His sureness—or naïveté—began to falter on 12 October 1809. An eighteen-year-old Saxon named Frédéric Staaps attended a parade in Schönbrunn with the intention of assassinating the Emperor. Several Imperial Guards thwarted his efforts before Napoleon even noticed the would-be assassin’s presence. Given the man’s age, Napoleon was curious about his motive and interrogated him personally. The young man claimed, “The voice of God told me that the death of a single man would pacify everything.”¹⁰⁷ Four days later, when informed that the continuous cannon fire outside the prison was in celebration of peace between France and Austria, he threw his hands in the air and looked to the ceiling, proclaiming, “Oh God, how I thank you! Peace is made, and I am not an assassin!”¹⁰⁸ His joy was short lived, however, as he faced a firing squad less than two hours later.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Conner, *Age of Napoleon*, 85.

¹⁰⁶ Schom, *Napoleon*, 282.

¹⁰⁷ Pierre-Marie Desmarest, *Témoignages historiques, de quinze ans de haute police sous Napoléon* (Paris: Alphonse Levavasseur, 1833), 245.

¹⁰⁸ Desmarest, *Témoignages*, 248.

¹⁰⁹ I include basic information about Staaps’ failed attempt on the life of the Emperor not because it constituted a conspiracy, but because of the impact it had on Napoleon’s confidence in the stability of his regime. Desmarest, chief of police for more than a decade, contends that the young man was a member of the German Illuminati and that he was the active hand of a larger conspiracy to rid Europe of Napoleon. He does not, however, present sufficient evidence to support this conclusion in his work.

It was not only assassination attempts that posed a threat to Napoleon. His failure to consider the precarious position in which he left his nation when on military campaign was directly responsible for at least three conspiracies against him. Although Napoleon gave his absence little thought at this point in his reign, to savvy politicians and military officers, the dangerous circumstances were clear. Communication between the Emperor and Paris took several days to accomplish when he was on campaign with his troops. While in Spain in 1808, for example, a single message between the army and Paris would have required a minimum of four days to arrive. It was around this precise situation that Malet designed a conspiracy in late May 1808. He and his followers printed and planned to distribute seemingly official government documents announcing the death of Napoleon on the battlefield and the creation of a new regime. Two anxious members of the group inadvertently thwarted the plan a mere four days before the plot's planned date. They argued about its details in front of a retired general seeking readmission to active military service. He immediately informed Prefect of Police Dubois of what he had overheard. By mid-July, all of the involved malcontents were under arrest. On 23 October, Malet wrote to the Emperor himself to explain why he had dared conspire against his regime. His goal had been, he claimed, to ensure the long-term prosperity of the nation. He asked, "What will happen to us if we lose our Emperor?"¹¹⁰

The combination of plots centered on falsified reports of his death, and direct attacks on his person significantly damaged Napoleon's confidence in the stability of his regime. It brought to the forefront of his mind a concern that he had held for some years: there was no hope that his marriage to Josephine would produce an heir. He did not want to see his empire divided among his brothers, an event he expected to occur should he die without an heir of his own. Regardless

¹¹⁰ Masson, *La Vie et les conspirations*, 155.

of the support he might receive from the French masses, the regime would never be the permanent institution he hoped it to be unless he had a son. When death found Napoleon, his nation would once again be catapulted into civil chaos. Republicans and Royalists would clash, rekindling the Revolutionary fire.

Having addressed the issues of internal strife among his officials, Napoleon turned his focus to the unpleasant task of informing Josephine of their impending divorce. Despite the numerous infidelities committed on both sides, the two had truly cared for one another. After a strained and quiet dinner, the Emperor bluntly—if not cruelly—explained his reasoning: “I need a womb.”¹¹¹ The Empress was not surprised, devastated though she was. Her fear of such a fate had grown alongside Napoleon’s power. She recognized that he could never achieve his ultimate goal of creating a hereditary dynasty as long as their marriage continued. On 15 December 1809, the imperial couple announced their divorce to a room full of courtiers. The occasion was emotional for both. Having thanked Josephine for their time together, Napoleon sat, in tears, on his throne. Before her own emotions forced her to stop, the Empress declared that she was proud of having the opportunity to make such a sacrifice on behalf of France. Arch-Chancellor Jean Jacques Régis de Cambacérès then announced the Senate’s decree that the divorce was complete and bestowed upon Josephine a pension of two million francs.

Now officially divorced, Napoleon turned his attention to finding Josephine’s successor. He perceived two especially advantageous candidates: Czar Alexander I’s sister and Austrian Emperor Francis I’s daughter. He pursued the Russian option first, but Alexander replied that his sister, not yet sixteen years old, was simply too young to wed. Perhaps after a few years had passed, the Czar suggested, he might reconsider the proposition. Napoleon was unwilling to

¹¹¹ Schom, *Napoleon*, 543.

wait. Two and a half months after suggesting a marriage alliance with Russia, he proposed the same to Austria. Emperor Francis approved the union but not from any sincere desire to ally with France. As State Minister Klemens von Metternich explained, the marriage was a necessary maneuver in order “to avoid all military action and to flatter . . . until the day of deliverance.”¹¹² Obediently, the nineteen-year-old Marie-Louise traveled to France, becoming Napoleon’s second wife on 11 March 1810.

Although the fact that his new bride was young and healthy enough to bear him children satisfied Napoleon, the French people as a whole did not share his sentiment. For the first time, one of his decisions flew in the face of the desires and hopes of the masses. Less than two decades earlier, they had declared their violent hatred and distrust of another Austrian bride by beheading Marie-Antoinette. Now they found her niece as their new empress. Rumors spread after the marriage that anyone who had voted in favor of or otherwise supported the deaths of Louis XVI and his queen would face exile. The divorce also disappointed Revolutionaries because Josephine was one of their own, having spent time in prison after petitioning for the release of her estranged Jacobin husband. Napoleon incorrectly believed that the union would earn him respect and acceptance among Europe’s other monarchs. Yet no matter whom he took for his wife, the European monarchs vowed never to accept a Bonaparte among their ranks. The Emperor was also under the mistaken impression that with a marriage alliance in place, Austria would support his aspirations, allowing him to continue expanding his territory and power. Although no one but Napoleon himself truly approved of the union, its value became apparent when the couple announced Marie-Louise’s pregnancy a few months later. The Emperor

¹¹² McLynn, *Napoleon*, 467.

rejoiced at the possibility of having a son, but his opponents recognized that their goal of overthrowing the Empire would become more difficult once he had an heir.¹¹³

Marie-Louise gave birth to a son, known as the King of Rome, on 20 March 1811. Napoleon rejoiced at the news, believing that he had succeeded in making his imperial regime permanent through a hereditary succession. Despite their hatred of the boy's Austrian mother, the masses shared their Emperor's hope that European monarchs would finally acknowledge the regime's legitimacy. They were excited at the prospect of peace: now that the Emperor had a son, he would put war aside to supervise the child's upbringing. Minister of Police Savary wrote, the "people sincerely anticipated a period of profound peace; the idea of war and occupations of that sort were no longer entertained as being realistic."¹¹⁴

Economic hardships beginning in 1811 reignited anxieties. The high cost and shortage of bread resulting from a mediocre harvest in 1810 became more burdensome after an even less successful crop the following year. By March 1812, bread prices in Paris had reached 18 sous per loaf—officials considered 20 sous per loaf a critical situation. Napoleon recognized that prices were more unreasonable in rural areas but focused primarily on keeping food available to the capital city for fear that bread riots in Paris could quickly transform into large-scale revolts. The situation required immediate attention because "the government is there, and soldiers do not like to shoot at women with babies on their backs who come screaming to the bakeries."¹¹⁵ No

¹¹³ An eighteen-year-old Prussian nobleman, Baron Dominique de la Sahla attempted to assassinate Napoleon in February 1811. Captured before any harm came to anyone, he explained during his interrogation that he had intended to murder the Emperor, expecting the loss to overwhelm the Empress and cause her to suffer a miscarriage. There is no evidence to suggest that la Sahla had any accomplices, though Chief of Police Desmarest, as before, contended that he was a member of the German Illuminati.

¹¹⁴ Adam Zamoyski, *Moscow 1812: Napoleon's Fatal March* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 10.

¹¹⁵ McLynn, *Napoleon*, 490-491.

significant disturbance occurred within the capital, allowing the Emperor to enact legislation to relieve the situation throughout the rest of the nation. He returned to the idea of soup kitchens which had proved effective earlier in his reign. Serving “Rumsford soup”—a concoction that required no flour and was allegedly as nutritious as bread—these establishments provided the sole means of survival for nearly one-third of the population in some of the more rural sections of France. With deteriorating conditions at home, it was likely that the masses would begin to realize that the Emperor’s attention was not as focused on the French people as it needed to be. If they were no longer satisfied with their living conditions, they would come to see that the continuation of war was the result of Napoleon’s personal ambition, rather than the effort to guarantee and to spread Revolutionary gains.

Another Napoleonic practice that began to take a toll on the population was the conscription needed to support the constant warfare. While his regime made extensive use of the process, forced military service was not one of Napoleon’s own inventions. A decree issued by the National Convention on 24 February 1793 immediately conscripted 300,000 men for military service, with each of the nation’s departments required to meet a quota. On 23 August 1793, the government issued a decree to eliminate any doubt that *all* French citizens were expected to serve their country as long as the Revolution continued. The first article assigned tasks to every section of the population: “From this moment until such a time as its enemies shall have been driven from the soil of the Republic, all Frenchmen are in permanent requisition for the services of the armies. The young men shall fight; the married men shall forge arms and transport provisions; the women shall make tents and clothes and shall serve in the hospitals; the children

shall turn old lint into linen; the old men shall betake themselves to the public squares in order to arouse the courage of the warriors and preach hatred of kings and the unity of the Republic.”¹¹⁶

The Directory continued the practice of conscription, enacting the Jourdan Law on 19 Fructidor VI (5 September 1798). It required all eighteen-year-old males to register for the draft, though they would not serve until they reached ages twenty to twenty-five. Registration did not necessarily mean that military service was inevitable. Men could legally avoid service if they were the head of a household, married, or the only son in their family.¹¹⁷ Members of certain professions, such as clergymen and doctors, also enjoyed exemption. A lottery system determined which citizens would serve, and those selected underwent physical examinations to exclude anyone unfit, including men under five feet tall. Despite the magnitude of the Napoleonic Wars, employment in the military rarely accounted for more than 3 percent of the population.¹¹⁸ Between 1800 and 1814, two million Frenchmen—approximately 7 percent of the nation’s entire population—found themselves drafted.¹¹⁹ It was not the number of men drafted that drained the country’s morale, but the constant need for the process in the first place.

¹¹⁶ *Archives Nationales*, C/264/dossier 602.

¹¹⁷ Many young men took advantage of the stipulation allowing married men to avoid military service. In 1813, the marriage rate in France reached the highest point in recorded history, according to Historian Roger Dufraisse. The marriage rate rose to 12.9%, versus 7.9% at the end of the *ancien régime*. Dufraisse, *Napoleon*, 87.

¹¹⁸ Conner, *Age of Napoleon*, 83.

¹¹⁹ Although the conscription rates under Napoleon’s leadership were high, they were not the highest suffered by the French. In fact, more men had been called to military service in the last year of the Directory than during the two highest years of conscription under Napoleon. In the last year of the Directory, 412,000 men were drafted. In 1808 and 1812, only 240,000 and 257,000, respectively, were called. The heaviest levies under Napoleon’s regime impacted no more than 53.32% of any individual class of men eligible for the draft. During certain years of World War I, the rate reached 80%. There were also periods under Napoleon where few conscripts were called to service. From October 1809-December 1810, for example, no one was conscripted. Sutherland, *France 1789-1815*, 378.

Citizens only became truly alarmed when levies began calling for more than one million individuals after the catastrophic fiasco in Russia in 1812.

Although he eventually chose to pursue it, Napoleon had recognized the difficulties invading Russia would entail. His political and military officials consistently advised against such action, pointing to the failure of numerous leaders in the past, such as Charles XII of Sweden. He guaranteed his advisors that he understood when and how to embark on an invasion of Russia and that the endeavor was not as hopeless or foolhardy as they insisted. His overconfidence was obvious in every statement he made concerning the impending assault.¹²⁰

On the night before Napoleon was to lead his *Grande Armée* into Russia, Prefect of Police Pasquier found himself fearing the possibility of the Emperor's enemies trying again to capitalize on his lengthy absence. If such circumstances arose, there would be no one in Paris with sufficient authority to quash the attempt. Having considered the prefect's concerns, Napoleon paced around the room and replied, "Yes, there is certainly some truth in what you say . . . but one must accomplish what has been undertaken."¹²¹ With that, the Emperor dismissed the subject and bid Pasquier a goodnight.

Pasquier's fears were not without reason, as everyone would soon learn. Napoleon's lenient treatment of some men who conspired against him in the past, coupled with the lengthy period of time he was away during the Russian campaign, worked in favor of General Malet. Despite an abortive attempt to overthrow the Empire in spring 1808 and a one-man raucous

¹²⁰ According to some historians, Napoleon underwent a significant personality change that impacted his leadership after 1811. Many cite his age, unchecked ambition and self-confidence as reasons for his "increasingly imprudent enterprises," such as setting out on the Russian campaign of 1812. Although he had always been ambitious and egotistical, these traits became heightened as his rule continued. By 1811, he was generally unwilling to accept counsel and seems to have developed a sort of contempt for people as a whole. Dufraisse, *Napoleon*, 113.

¹²¹ Zamoycki, *Moscow 1812*, 108.

debacle in June 1809, Malet received no severe punishment for his insubordination. In fact, in August 1809, he had petitioned the minister of police for relocation from Saint-Pélagie prison.¹²² His new residence offered little security, as it was really nothing more than a retirement home. The minister granted the request, though Malet was to remain under constant surveillance. This leniency backfired on the minister—and almost on the imperial regime as a whole—when the general and several accomplices left the rest home in October 1812 and implemented the most successful conspiracy in the history of Napoleonic government.

In October 1812, several weeks passed without any news reaching Paris from the Emperor and his *Grande Armée*. The lack of information quickly prompted rumors and speculations as to what might be happening in Russia. Already aware that the campaign had not gone well, Parisians were increasingly nervous as each day passed. Thinking the city rife with inquietude and disillusionment, Malet saw the latest opportunity for him to strike against Napoleon. With the Emperor in Russia and no imperial bulletins forthcoming, he knew that verification of the imperial death would be a slow and difficult undertaking. Given the recent lack of information received from the army, Malet did not expect such an announcement to meet much, if any, disbelief, especially if seemingly official government documents seconded the claim. The conspiracy began successfully enough with Malet and his followers gaining control of numerous military troops and with numerous political officials finding themselves under arrest. After several hours, however, Malet's identity as a political prisoner came to light, and the conspiracy ended. Although this plot was the most successful directed against Napoleon or his regime, it produced little impact on Parisians or on the nation as a whole. People in the

¹²² *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 2, document 239.

capital city discussed it “as a piece of outrageous folly,” if they bothered to speak of it at all.¹²³

Finally, after years of plotting against Napoleon, General Malet received a death sentence for his activities.

Knowing that additional news of the catastrophic conditions facing the *Grande Armée* in Russia was making its way to Paris, Napoleon worried that public opinion would be even further damaged given the recent attempt to overthrow his government. He feared that other political opponents, especially those outside Paris and in conquered territories, would seize the opportunity to act against him as well. Wanting to manage any ramifications caused by either—or both—situations, he explained to his advisers who had accompanied him on the Russian campaign that his presence was required back in his capital city.

Napoleon returned to Paris during the middle of the night on 18 December 1812.¹²⁴ Over the next several days, he met with the Senate, each member of which was anxious to impress upon him his undying loyalty. They sought to reduce the significance of events, seeking to assure the Emperor that his reign enjoyed solid support. Senator Louis-Philippe, Count of Ségur swore allegiance—his own, and that of the Senate as a whole—to Napoleon and the dynasty that would follow him: “In your absence a detestable plot was framed; some madman attempted to shake what genius and courage had founded. . . . We are ready to sacrifice every thing for your sacred person, for the perpetuation of your dynasty. Deign to receive this new oath: we will remain faithful to it till death.”¹²⁵ Despite verbal promises of loyalty, many of his officials’

¹²³ Étienne-Denis Pasquier, *Mémoires du chancelier Pasquier: Histoire de mon temps* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit & Co., 1893-1895), edited by Duke d’Audiffret-Pasquier, translated by Charles E. Roche as *A History of My Time: Memoirs of Chancellor Pasquier* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1893-1894), 2: 27.

¹²⁴ Pasquier, *History of My Time*, 2: 49.

¹²⁵ *Times* (London), 4 January 1813.

actions during dubious times betrayed their true feelings. Napoleon's regime had never enjoyed the stability that pre-Revolutionary dynasties had.

In the later years of his regime, Napoleon's military triumphs lessened, and the nation's enemies drew closer to Paris. As his hold on popular opinion diminished, he faced increasing danger from his officials and the weakness caused by their long-standing and conflicting political ideologies. The very men who had, at least outwardly, sworn allegiance to the imperial government forced their sovereign to abdicate on 6 April 1814. The end of the Napoleonic Empire was a long-sought victory for the Bourbon supporters vanquished by the chaos of the Revolution. Having replaced the Emperor with Louis XVIII, monarchists hoped to return France to a pre-Revolutionary state, or at the very least to a constitutional monarchy. Because the imperial interlude had not fully subdued the unrest ushered in by the Revolution, the newly reestablished Bourbon monarchy was destined to face upheaval.

What the Bourbons likely did not expect was that Bonaparte himself would be part of that upheaval. He returned to France from his exile on the island of Elba in March 1815 and retook political control of the nation. The past and now present Emperor announced to French citizens that his own rule had been deposed through the treachery of some of his military and political officials. His second attempt at ruling the nation would not enjoy long-term success, however, as his most vehement opponents—other European leaders—had been meeting at the Congress of Vienna since 1 November 1814 to establish a lasting European peace settlement out of the disorder caused first by the Revolution and then by Napoleon's reign. Assisting the leaders in an advisory position was Talleyrand, a man who had, at times, aided the Emperor's cause while simultaneously actively seeking to destroy it. After suffering defeat at Waterloo on 18 June

1815, Napoleon offered to abdicate in favor of his young son, now just over four years old. The European powers rejected the proposal and restored Louis XVIII to the throne—again.

CHAPTER THREE *CONSPIRATION DES POIGNARDS*

Joseph Céracchi and François Jean-Baptiste Topino-Lebrun dedicated themselves to art and the Republican ideals of the French Revolution. The two men established connections through their artwork among France's politicians and military officers, such as Dominique Demerville and General Joseph Antoine Aréna. These acquaintances were not enough, however, to ensure the artists' success. Céracchi and Topino-Lebrun saw their most prized projects discouraged or even outright rejected by the Republican governments they thought they could count as patrons. After finding their artistic hopes dashed, the two watched as the Consular regime delivered them political disappointment. They believed Napoleon was reversing important gains of the French Revolution and was, therefore, betraying the nation's Republicans. They joined with Aréna and Demerville to discuss a plan for relieving France of its supposedly counterrevolutionary leader. Unfortunately for them, none of the men proved to be capable conspirators. They disastrously mismanaged their plot from its inception and ultimately succeeded not in removing Napoleon from power, but in strengthening his grip on it.

Céracchi was an ill-mannered, hot-tempered, vain, and prideful man. His talent in sculpting earned him some celebrity, but his attitude toward his patrons negated it. Initially trained in his hometown of Rome, he left and sought new mentorship in England. There, the Royal Academy featured his portrait statues and busts in several exhibitions from 1776-1779, but when the institution denied him admission to its ranks, he threw a fit, stormed out, and left the country. He accomplished nothing of note until he settled in the United States in 1790. In Philadelphia, Céracchi found the means through which to express simultaneously his disgust with England and his love of Republican ideals. He focused his work on memorializing those most responsible for cutting ties with England's monarchy. Twenty-seven of America's

founding fathers agreed to sit for the artist as he created busts of them, many of which are still on display in various galleries throughout the country.

His skill and the celebrity of his subjects did not bring to Céracchi the influence he felt he deserved. He incorrectly believed that his reputation had earned him the right to complete any project at any cost. In 1783, the American Congress had agreed to fund the creation of an equestrian statue of George Washington to commemorate his contributions to the founding of the nation. With the commission still available on 31 October 1791, Céracchi proposed an ambitious sculpture in place of the modest statue initially sought. In his official bid to the Senate and House of Representatives, he titled his project the “Monument designed to perpetuate the Memory of American Liberty.” When completed, it would be 60 feet in height, with each of the figures involved measuring 15 feet. According to the description he provided, the sculpture would include not only the equestrian statue of Washington, but also figures of several Greek and Roman gods, “a Genius, in the form of an infant . . . a female figure, expressive of Policy . . . an elderly man . . . trampling on a Crown . . . Benevolent Nature [issuing] from a Cavern . . . crowned with thirteen towers, and overhead four Infants, representing the Seasons.”¹²⁶ On 7 May 1792, Congress informed Céracchi that it would not fund the project, explaining “at the present time it might not be expedient to go into the expenses which the Monument voted by Congress . . . would require, especially with the additional ornaments proposed by the artist.”¹²⁷

With his lofty memorial to Liberty denied, Céracchi returned to Italy and focused again on simple busts. He completed several pieces, whose original versions had been only clay and

¹²⁶ For the sake of space, the full description had not been reproduced here. Mark A. Mastromarino, ed., *The Papers of George Washington*, Vol. 9: *23 September 1791-29 February 1792* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 132-133.

¹²⁷ Mastromarino, *Papers of George Washington*, 9: 132-133.

plaster, in the finest marble he could find. He accomplished these pieces without having spoken to the models who had posed for them. When he had finished his work, he sent letters to the American models discussing payment. Most declined to purchase the work, leaving him to swallow the cost. Among those who refused the expensive sculptures was George Washington. Incensed, Céracchi sent the President a bill for \$1,500, which was promptly ignored.¹²⁸

Although he had lost faith in his hero, Céracchi did not turn from his Republican ideals. He joined the Jacobin club in Rome and watched as Napoleon fought his way through Italy, establishing Republican states in his wake. Céracchi anxiously awaited the creation of a Roman Republic. Patience was not one of his strongpoints, however, and he decided to take matters into his own hands in late December 1797. After rousing and arming his fellow Jacobins, he led a band of them to the home of French ambassador and brother of Napoleon, Joseph Bonaparte. Addressing the ambassador himself, he began “screaming out like a madman, that the Romans *would* be free, and that they demanded the support of France.”¹²⁹ Joseph implored the demonstrators to leave before the situation spiraled out of control. Suddenly, a detachment of Papal Guards arrived to investigate the riot. Intimidated, the Jacobins pushed into the palace, which was carelessly unlocked. When the Papal Guards began to pursue them, Joseph reminded them that the embassy was French territory. The officer in charge then ordered his men to leave.

Witnessing the Guards’ retreat, Céracchi and his fellow Jacobins took the offensive and pursued them to the Porta Settimiana garrison. Wanting to explain the situation as the mob approached, Joseph and General Léonard Mathurin Duphot accompanied the mob. Their actions did not portray a peaceful intention, however, as the two men brandished swords while marching

¹²⁸ Mastromarino, *Papers of George Washington*, 9: 132-133.

¹²⁹ David Silvagni, *La Corte e la Società Romana nei XVIII e XIX secoli*, translated by Fanny MacLaughlin as *Rome, Its Princes, Priests and People* (London: Elliot Stock, 1885), 1: 278.

at the front of the hostile crowd. As they neared the gates, Duphot took the lead and shouted to the Papal Guards to lower their weapons. Not understanding the directive because it was in French, the Guards believed they were under attack and fired upon the mob. Duphot fell victim to the volley, while C racchi and the other rioters fled.

C racchi succeeded, however violently, in his goal of stimulating the creation of a Roman Republic. Outraged at the violence and the danger the Papal Guards had posed to his brother specifically, Napoleon used the situation as justification for invading Rome. By February 1798, French troops controlled the city, and on 7 March, they ousted Pope Pius VI as temporal leader and proclaimed the creation of the Roman Republic. With his political mission achieved, C racchi hoped to live a quiet life. Events in fall 1799, however, reignited his ideological passions and drew him to Paris and into another violent undertaking.

Fran ois Jean-Baptiste Topino-Lebrun led a peaceful life, which he dedicated to his painting. He met celebrated French artist Jacques-Louis David and worked with him in Paris for several years. In 1790, Topino-Lebrun returned to Rome and joined the Jacobin club. Outside of the group, however, he faced constant complaints about his support for the Revolution and, therefore, was unable to garner support for his Republican-inspired artwork. He returned to Paris in December 1792 and resided with David.

Known for his evenhanded Republican values, Topino-Lebrun earned a seat on the Revolutionary tribunal of Paris in September 1793. His political steadiness did not last, however, after he befriended the radical Fran ois-No l Babeuf, better known as Gracchus Babeuf, in autumn 1795. Disillusioned with the Directorial government from its inception on 2 November 1795, Babeuf proclaimed in several issues of his *Le Tribun du Peuple* the need for overthrowing the regime through a thorough purging of government officials. Such actions, he

claimed, would destroy “the totality of the starvers, the plunderers, the butchers.”¹³⁰ Babeuf’s plot existed more in theory than in practice and the infiltration of a police spy into the conspiratorial network ruined any chances of success it may have had.

As the government built its case against Babeuf and sixty-four co-defendants, the conspirators’ supporters launched several uncoordinated and feeble bids to free them. The most serious attempt took place in September 1796, when a large group attempted to convert the soldiers stationed at Grenelle to Babeuf’s cause. The effort failed, and fifty-one rioters, including Topino-Lebrun, found themselves under arrest. Of those arrested, thirty-three faced varying degrees of punishment, while Topino-Lebrun and seventeen others were acquitted. Once Babeuf’s own trial finished on 26 May, he and one other defendant received the death penalty. Upon hearing the verdict, each of the men stabbed themselves with hidden, makeshift knives. Their attempts at suicide failed, and they met with the guillotine the next day.

Topino-Lebrun had escaped punishment for any wrongdoing related to Babeuf’s conspiracy at large, but his reputation as a politician was ruined. He focused again on his artwork, completing *La Mort de Caius Gracchus* (*The Death of Caius Gracchus*), an allusion to his friend’s suicide effort, in 1798. He then proposed to the Citizen Friends of the Arts a massive work entitled *Le Siège de Lacédémone par Pyrrhus* (*The Siege of Sparta by Pyrrhus*). After informing the group that he intended to realize the project on a canvas thirty feet across and

¹³⁰ Babeuf’s first term was “*affameurs*,” which translates awkwardly into “starver.” “Hoarder” may be a better translation, as various groups have levied such charges against the French government, regardless of format, throughout history. Gracchus Babeuf, *Le Tribun du Peuple; ou le Défenseur des droits de l’homme*, edited by C. Babeuf (Milan: Galli Thierry & Company, 1966), 240.

twenty-three feet tall, he asked for 6,000 *livres* and about two years to complete it.¹³¹ Soon after the society commissioned his work, Topino-Lebrun wrote to the Ministry of the Interior asking permission to use the Panthéon as a studio, given the massive proportions of the piece.¹³² It is unclear whether the government approved his request. After the events of 18 Brumaire that instituted Napoleon's Consular government, however, his workplace failed to matter as he simply lost his motivation. Writing to an unnamed friend, Topino-Lebrun explained the wretchedness he felt as the witnessed Revolutionary achievements undone. He lamented the return to celebrating Sundays, rather than the *décade* that had replaced them and decried the increased tolerance of religion in general. He had not given up hope, however, of seeing a stable and functional Republican government installed in France. Ominously, he concluded his letter by sharing his intention "to finish some business that will allow me to pick up my brushes once more."¹³³

A conspiracy concocted at the home of Dominique Demerville provided Topino-Lebrun the opportunity to revitalize his motivation. Demerville, a fervent Revolutionary who had been secretary to several Republican officials, disapproved of the continued efforts of the government to negotiate the official reintroduction of Catholicism into the country. He had commented to Lucien Bonaparte, Napoleon's brother, in early 1799 that he believed priests were leading the Directorial government. "If we had your brother," he suggested, "we would be much

¹³¹¹³¹ *Nouvelles archives de l'art français, recueil des documents inédits publiés par la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art Français* (Paris: Charavay Frères, Librairies de la Société, 1880-81), 2: 352.

¹³²¹³² Topino-Lebrun had a habit of not dating his correspondence. He proposed the massive work in 1798-1799, between the completion of *La Mort de Caius Gracchus* and the Directory's overthrow on 18 Brumaire. *Nouvelles archives*, 2: 354.

¹³³ Given events and his attitude toward them, Topino-Lebrun most likely wrote this letter in August 1800. *Nouvelles archives*, 2: 354.

happier.”¹³⁴ When Napoleon did, in fact, take political control of the country in November 1799, the new regime did nothing to settle Demerville’s discontent. His fervent Jacobinism flared. He distrusted the amount of political control the First Consul held and expected him to continue gathering even more. Ultimately, he believed that Napoleon wanted either to take the throne of France for himself or to institute a Bourbon restoration. By summer 1800, Demerville found himself seriously ill, hampering his ability to champion the cause against the First Consul. Unable to play any active role in removing Napoleon from power, he gathered in his home friends who would support such a project.

Céracchi frequently visited after learning that his friend was sick. He had befriended Demerville while fashioning a bust of former National Convention deputy Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac, for whom Demerville had served as secretary. Since the institution of the Consular regime, they frequently discussed their shared animosity toward Napoleon. Bonaparte’s declaration of the Roman Republic in 1798 had won him Céracchi’s support, but his actions—or lack thereof—on the Italian peninsula ever since distressed him. According to the sculptor, Bonaparte “took no interest in the success of the [Italian] Republic” after its creation.¹³⁵ He mourned for the Italian Republicans who were losing the battle for their homeland as it returned to papal control. Knowing the shared disappointment they felt with Napoleon and his new regime, Céracchi introduced another friend, former General Joseph Antoine Aréna, to Demerville.

¹³⁴ *Procès instruit par le tribunal criminel du département de la Seine, contre Demerville, Céracchi, Aréna et autres, prévenus de conspiration contre la personne du premier Consul Bonaparte; suivi des débats et du jugement intervenus sur le pourvoi en cassation des condamnés* (Paris: Imprimerie de la République, an IX), 37.

¹³⁵ *Procès instruit*, 256.

Unlike his fellow conspirators, Aréna had personally met Napoleon. They fought together at the siege of Toulon, where Aréna, like Bonaparte, served with distinction. Any amicability between them as a result of their military experiences was not enough to overcome their political differences. Aréna served as a member of the Directory's Council of Five Hundred. On the day following Napoleon's seizure of power and, thereby, the destruction of the Directory, he resigned his military commission in opposition to the new regime and its leader. Unemployed, he focused his attention on finding others who shared his disapproval.

In late summer 1800, Aréna revealed to Céracchi his hopes of assassinating Napoleon. Enthusiastic and wanting to ensure as much support as possible for the plot, Céracchi introduced Aréna to Demerville. When the three men met, Aréna explained that he was not prepared to share specific details but told his associates that a plot was coming together with the backing of numerous other generals who wished to remain anonymous for the time. In fact, Aréna did not share details because there were no details to share. This very discussion marked the inception of the conspiracy. There were no generals waiting to launch an attack. No one was ironing out any plans. Aréna had seized on the idea of finding willing participants in the First Consul's murder and simply fabricated a tale to entice them even more. According to Aréna, the plans were solidifying, but the men designated to strike the actual blow against Napoleon's person needed additional protection during the attack. He charged his two co-conspirators to find the extra security and provided them with funds for arming and paying the guards.

Being personally unable to complete the tasks assigned by Aréna, Demerville found someone who could: Captain Jacques Harel. The two had previously served together in the military. Due to a reorganization of some Italian-based regiments in August 1799, however, Harel now found himself unemployed and dejected. Demerville knew well the disappointment

his friend felt at no longer serving: “You see that the former soldiers, the patriots, are without work. There is absolutely only one thing to do.”¹³⁶ He advised that a plan was underway, with substantial—but unnamed—military support, to remove Bonaparte from power through assassination. Harel seconded his disgust for the Consular regime before taking his leave from the residence and going immediately to the home of Commissioner of War Jean-Philippe Lefebvre.

Even if Harel did resent the Consular government, he was not interested in participating in any effort aimed at assassinating its leader. He informed Lefebvre of everything he knew, which was little at the time. Promising him that he would be safe from prosecution, the commissioner convinced Harel to learn as much as possible about the plot.¹³⁷ Over the next weeks, the informant pressed his friend for more information, including, most important, who was leading it. Demerville provided dozens of names of high-ranking military officials but did not identify any of them, including Aréna, as the principal player. Even Minister of Police Joseph Fouché counted himself among the collaborators, Demerville bragged. Unconvinced, Harel asked for proof of Fouché’s complicity. Demerville explained that the police had recently arrested one of their associates, a citizen Rossignol but “as soon as the minister of police learned

¹³⁶ *Procès instruit*, 25.

¹³⁷ Harel was not only safe from prosecution, but also received other benefits for acting as an informant. He was restored to active military service and found himself named commandant of Vincennes. He was stationed at the château upon the infamous execution of the Duke d’Engbien in March 1804. Harel was not above mentioning his part in thwarting Demerville’s conspiracy when doing so served his purpose. When petitioning for admission to the Legion of Honor, he mentioned this particular service that he had provided to the Consular government in its infancy. Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, *The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte, with Notes, Now First Added from the Dictation of Napoleon at St. Helena, from the Memoirs of the Duke of Rovigo, of General Rapp, of Constant, and Numerous Other Authentic Sources* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), 2: 24. *Archives Nationales*, LH/1267/65.

that he was part of our complot, he had him placed at liberty, him and his friends.”¹³⁸ Just as Aréna had fabricated the list of generals who were willing to support their scheme, Demerville now exaggerated Rossignol’s situation to the point of falsehood. Rossignol never had anything to do with their plot. That the police had arrested a man and then released him after his interrogation was not unusual. It certainly did not implicate Fouché—or anyone else—in any conspiratorial actions.

Demerville assured Harel that everything was progressing nicely, and that there were few details left to arrange. Reminding his friend that he was unable to leave his home for long periods of time due to his illness, Demerville asked Harel to complete the remaining tasks. They had little time to act, he advised, as the attack was to take place in only a few days, on 10 October, at the opening performance at the opera of Antonio Salieri’s *Les Horaces*. He directed Harel to find “four fully determined men” to serve as extra security for the assassins and to buy pistols and blunderbusses.¹³⁹ Wasting no time, Harel made the necessary purchases on the following day. He also received from the Ministry of Police several men who feigned support for the plot and agreed to act as guards. In the meantime, Céracchi had met several times with Topino-Lebrun, who gave him twelve daggers fashioned specifically for the assassination. Céracchi passed them all to Demerville, who convinced the sculptor to keep three for himself. Six others went to Harel, who was to supply them to the four-man security team he had hired.

On the morning of the attack, Céracchi met with the man designated as the assassin of Bonaparte, Joseph Diana, and gave to him one of the daggers. Finding himself with two other blades that he had no need of, Céracchi simply “tossed them in the river above the Tuileries.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ *Procès instruit*, 27.

¹³⁹ *Procès instruit*, 26.

¹⁴⁰ *Procès instruit*, 55.

Harel assembled his police-manned security team and gave each a dagger. He kept one of the weapons for himself to maintain his cover as a willing conspirator but delivered the sixth to Lefebvre. Demerville remained at his home as his cohorts finalized preparations for the plot. That afternoon, he received an unexpected visit from his friend and former employer, Barère. Upon entering the home, Barère noticed that his friend had changed from his usual bedclothes into garments suitable for a social gathering or travel. “You are well dressed,” Barère commented, “what are your plans?”¹⁴¹ Demerville answered that he was preparing to “go to the countryside to accelerate my recuperation.”¹⁴² During the brief visit, Demerville flitted about his room anxiously and stammered through his conversation. Barère took up his hat and prepared to leave, explaining that he had plans for the day, culminating in his attendance at the opening performance of *Les Horaces*. Demerville stopped suddenly and turned to his friend to verify what he had said. Receiving confirmation that Barère did, in fact, have tickets to the show, Demerville advised: “I encourage you not to go, I advise it; I heard it said that there may be trouble, restlessness, and that it might surround the performance.”¹⁴³ Barère replied that he was sure everything would be fine and left.

As the time of the performance neared, everyone took their positions. Not having a role in the actual attack, Demerville spent the evening at a café between his home and the Tuileries palace. Topino-Lebrun ventured to the home of a fellow painter. Here, he intended to meet with several friends before heading to the opera. When he arrived, he found only his friend’s wife, who explained that the group had already left and that they had given his ticket to someone

¹⁴¹ *Procès instruit*, 111.

¹⁴² *Procès instruit*, 111.

¹⁴³ *Procès instruit*, 111.

else.¹⁴⁴ With his plans for the evening spoiled, he returned home. Harel and his four-man security team met briefly with C racchi before taking their places near the First Consul’s box. C racchi also met with Diana to designate the sign for launching the assassination. Diana then entered the seating area to find a spot from where he could await the signal.

Diana was not the only man keeping a close eye on C racchi. Officers disguised as theatre-goers had taken positions surrounding the opera house and at various points inside. The conspirators took no action during the first act of the performance. During the second, Ar na left the building and returned home, having made no contact with his associates in the theatre. Shortly after the general’s departure, C racchi walked the corridors toward Napoleon’s box to ensure that everything was ready for the attack. As he approached the entrance to the box, he found the four-man security team in place. Suddenly, one of the men, Jean-Augustin Laborde, broke formation, grabbing C racchi and placing him under arrest. With one man detained, the police moved throughout the theatre to remove any other threats. Officials found Diana at his seat, staring at the First Consul’s box, still waiting for a sign from C racchi.

Waiting for the conspirator to return, officers had taken positions in front of and around Demerville’s home. The suspect noticed the commotion as he approached the building. Avoiding it, he made his way to a friend’s home on the rue d’Argenteuil.¹⁴⁵ On the following morning, he wrote a letter inquiring about the trouble and sent it immediately to Minister of Police Fouch . He received a prompt response. Fouch  explained that he was “strongly accused” and that he should come to his home the next morning.¹⁴⁶ When Demerville arrived,

¹⁴⁴ Sources do not identify the painter, other than as Gотреau. His wife testified during the trial, however, and was named as Marie-Fran oise Vanoir.

¹⁴⁵ Throughout his testimony, Demerville emphatically declined to name his friend, though she is identifiable as a woman by the pronouns used. *Proc s instruit*, 45, 113.

¹⁴⁶ *Proc s instruit*, 115.

the minister informed him that he “was accused of wanting to make a conspiracy.”¹⁴⁷ As such, Fouché had one of his officers escort the accused to the Prefecture of Police, where he faced interrogation before finding himself under arrest.

Two other conspirators had also evaded police on the night of the performance. Aréna had left the show by the end of the second act, before Céracchi attempted to set the plot into motion. He remained at his home for two days, unaffected by the arrests of Céracchi, Diana, and Demerville. On 12 October, however, a police inspector arrived to place him under arrest as well. He willingly accompanied the officer to the Prefecture of Police and found himself confined to the Temple prison after his interrogation. Topino-Lebrun also spent two days carrying out his daily routine as usual. As he went to lunch on 12 October, the attendant at his building told him to be careful because the authorities were looking to arrest him. Learning that the police had already detained several other people related to the conspiracy, he sought safety at a friend’s home on the rue de Tournon. It was at this location that police found and arrested him, the last of the group, on 14 October.¹⁴⁸

Although the alleged conspirators were all in custody by 14 October, their trial did not begin until 7 January 1801. The delay prompted discussions among some officials about

¹⁴⁷ *Procès instruit*, 115.

¹⁴⁸ On the night of the conspiracy, officers had arrested three citizens at Demerville’s home and charged them as participants in the conspiracy. Madeleine-Charlotte-Claudine-Louise Fumey, a relative of Demerville’s, had lived with him since his illness began. Arnaud Daiteg, another relative, had come to the home to deliver to Fumey a knife she asked him to purchase for her. A friend of Demerville’s, Denis Lavigne, had come to his house to return a pamphlet he had borrowed, the seditious *Le Turc et le militaire français*. The author of the document, Bernard Metge, was a Jacobin dissident who opposed Bonaparte’s rule. His pamphlet compares Napoleon to Julius Caesar and calls for France’s Brutuses to rise up and to assassinate their leader. Bernard Metge, *Le Turc et le militaire français, dialogue sur l’expédition d’Égypte et analyse des dépêches de Menou relatives à l’assassinat du général Kléber, commandant en chef l’armée d’Orient* (Paris: Metge, an IX).

whether an assassination plot against Napoleon had existed at all. One of Napoleon's personal secretaries, Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, believed that the "plot itself was a mere shadow."¹⁴⁹ He argued that without the interference of the Commissioner of War and the Ministry of Police, Aréna and his accomplices would never have managed to take even the slightest action. It was only the encouragement offered by Harel, the police informant, that prompted the men to arm themselves. Bourrienne acknowledged that the group was considering a plot, but concluded that it would not have come to fruition without the government's involvement. Minister of Police Fouché seconded Bourrienne's opinion of the conspiracy. In his memoirs, he stated that the scheme was mere figment until Napoleon decided to use the situation to his own advantage. According to Fouché, had Harel not infiltrated the group and had he not had the financial support of the authorities, the conspiracy might have remained a pipedream that existed only in Demerville's residence.¹⁵⁰ The argument is convincing, but only to an extent. The plot discussed in Demerville's home might not have come to fruition in October 1800 without Harel's involvement, but the men would likely have found encouragement and funding from another source at some point. Given the sparse nature of the plot itself—a handful of men armed with daggers—not a great deal of money was necessary.

Bourrienne and Fouché agreed that the plot was insubstantial prior to the government's involvement, but their opinions differ on the impact the scheme had on Napoleon. Bourrienne included in his memoirs a statement attributed to Napoleon—though the author admitted that he doubted the leader actually said it—while exiled at Saint Helena, which described the

¹⁴⁹ Bourrienne, *Life of Napoleon*, 2: 23.

¹⁵⁰ Harel did, as Fouché explained, receive funding from the government to be used to encourage the conspiracy. Given the fact that he purchased the pistols and blunderbusses with money from Demerville and Céracchi, however, it is clear that the plot did not rely solely, or even primarily, on government funds.

conspiration des poignards as one of “the two attempts which placed me in the greatest danger.”¹⁵¹ On the other hand, Fouché contended that the First Consul had not, in fact, felt any genuine anxiety about the conspiracy. The danger resulted solely from Napoleon’s own interpretation of the event. The minister explained that it was the First Consul’s “wish to have it believed that he had incurred great danger.”¹⁵² Given later conspiracies enacted against him, it is doubtful that Napoleon attributed as much importance to Céracchi’s attempt as the comment from Saint Helena implied. The very next plot missed killing him only by a few seconds. The capture and replacement of several high-ranking political officials while Napoleon was away in Russia in 1812 did not pose an immediate physical threat to Napoleon, but it was the most successful attempt at destroying his regime. Another reason for Napoleon not to have been concerned about Céracchi’s plot was the simple fact that officials had informed him of it prior to his departure for the performance. Aware of when and how the conspirators planned to bring about his death and also aware that the police had taken appropriate steps to ensure his safety, Napoleon had no reason to fear the would-be assassins.

The conspirators had languished in prison for just over two months when a new plot, the “infernal machine,” detonated on Christmas Eve. The First Consul narrowly missed the explosion. Napoleon launched into a furious rage. Police could easily stop a poorly organized group of malcontents armed with daggers, but a massive explosion in the streets was more difficult to discover. The Jacobins, Napoleon believed, were becoming increasingly daring, and, therefore, increasingly dangerous. Because of the nearly successful assassination attempt, Napoleon demanded the courts begin the trial of Céracchi and his cohorts. The First Consul

¹⁵¹ Bourrienne, *Life of Napoleon*, 2: 22.

¹⁵² Joseph Fouché, *Memoirs of Joseph Fouché* (Paris: Société des Bibliophiles, 1903), 1: 144.

adamantly insisted that the Jacobins were behind the latest plot as well: “It is scarce three months since my life was attempted by Céracchi, Aréna, Topino-Lebrun, and Demerville. They all belong to one gang!”¹⁵³ Napoleon wanted to make an example of those who dared to threaten him and of those who shared the same ideologies. Céracchi and his co-conspirators happened already to be in custody. They would serve to set an immediate example while the investigation into the infernal machine progressed. In early January 1801, the First Consul also ordered Minister of Police Joseph Fouché to compile a list of 130 of the conspirators’ fellow Jacobins whom he then sentenced to immediate banishment. There was no trial, no evidence of wrongdoing against any of them, except the deeds of Céracchi and his associates.

Céracchi and his co-defendants stood accused “of a plot intending the murder of the First Consul, of troubling the State with civil war by arming citizens, one against the other, of having amassed and distributed weapons, and of having taken them, last 18 Vendémiaire, to the Theatre of the Republic and of the Arts where the First Consul was in attendance.”¹⁵⁴ Even without Harel’s testimony, the information provided by each of the conspirators during their initial interrogations was sufficient proof of their guilt. Each man admitted to any number of details: meeting with the other defendants, arming themselves, being disappointed with the Consular regime’s policies, and even hating Napoleon on a personal level.

The defense Demerville attempted to provide for himself illustrated not innocence but incompetence. He acknowledged that his associates had met frequently in his home and that he had overheard their seditious conversations. Because he had been “in [his] bed, sick, terribly

¹⁵³ There was not, in fact, a three month period between the two attacks, according to either the traditional calendar or the Revolutionary one. Céracchi’s plot took place on 10 October (18 Vendémiaire) and the infernal machine exploded on 24 December (3 Nivôse). Bourrienne, *Life of Napoleon*, 2: 27.

¹⁵⁴ *Procès instruit*, 15.

sick . . . not in a state to be able to speak,” however, he believed himself guiltless.¹⁵⁵ Initially, Demerville confessed to passing money to Harel and to giving him daggers for the security team to use during the attack. During the trial itself, however, he said that the money was for Harel to purchase weapons for C racchi.¹⁵⁶ Whether the money bought daggers for the plot or guns for one of the individual conspirators was inconsequential.

C racchi confessed to everything: to knowing his co-defendants personally, to having met with them at Demerville’s residence to form a plot, to distributing money and weapons, and to hating Napoleon. It is clear in several of his responses that he had made a clear distinction between Napoleon as a person and Napoleon as a political leader: “I did not plot against the life of the First Consul, but against that of Bonaparte.”¹⁵⁷ His actions were not, he argued, political but personal. He had no intention of taking control of the government for himself and no interest in who might take the reins after the death of the First Consul. Harkening back to the recent collapse of the Roman Republic, he explained that he wanted to murder Napoleon “because he caused the ruin of my family and of my country.”¹⁵⁸

Unlike Demerville and C racchi, Ar na attempted to maintain his innocence throughout his interrogations and during the trial. Contradictions and flawed logic rendered his arguments ineffective. He acknowledged attending the theatre on the night of the conspiracy but had left

¹⁵⁵ *Proc s instruit*, 31.

¹⁵⁶ *Proc s instruit*, 33.

¹⁵⁷ The distinction is tenuous, but in the legal world, a minor technicality can be enough to produce a mistrial or acquittal. The defense attorneys seized on this possibility and championed C racchi’s separation of Napoleon as a private person from his political role. They contended, “In a word, aiming to kill a single individual, and aiming at the toppling of the entire State, are two absolutely and immensely different things.” The court’s rebuttal was inspiring. Upon receiving the title of First Consul, the deputy commissioner explained, Napoleon ceased to exist as a private person. He became “the work of the nation; it is for herself that the nation created this high office, and not for the man who is clothed in it.” *Proc s instruit*, 61, 399, 466.

¹⁵⁸ *Proc s instruit*, 63.

early, unable to find a suitable seat. Because he was at his home by 7:00 p.m., he explained, he “could not have been at the theatre at the time of the First Consul’s arrival.”¹⁵⁹ In his very next comment, however, he described seeing “in the rue de la Loi . . . the car of the First Consul, with his secretary, and a small cabriolet that followed, in which one found the youngest brother of Bonaparte, Jérôme, in military uniform.”¹⁶⁰ Clearly, he was, in fact, at the theatre at the same time as Napoleon. Perhaps Aréna meant that he had not been *inside* the theatre as the politician arrived and not, therefore, in position to make any strike against him. Aréna then absurdly defended himself by admitting his involvement in numerous conspiratorial discussions. He had even documented them in a letter to the First Consul on 13 October, the day after his arrest. He would not provide specific details, he explained, but he could discuss the plots in the most general manner: “People have conspired for a year; all the parties are working together; everyone is talking about it in the streets and in the salons.”¹⁶¹

Topino-Lebrun also declared his innocence throughout the entire ordeal. He complained that there was no physical evidence to implicate him in the plot and that the testimony against him, which came only from Céracchi, was so vague as to render a defense against it impossible. An officer had asked Céracchi, “In which place did Topino give you the daggers?”¹⁶² The simple answer, “in the street,” was unsatisfactory, therefore the officer followed up: “In which street and at what time?”¹⁶³ Céracchi shared three locations for the meetings but never provided

¹⁵⁹ No source mentions the specific time that Napoleon arrived at the theatre. Given the information provided during the depositions at the Prefecture of Police and the testimonies at trial, however, it seems that the First Consul had been present since the show’s beginning. *Procès instruit*, 72.

¹⁶⁰ *Procès instruit*, 72.

¹⁶¹ *Procès instruit*, 303.

¹⁶² *Procès instruit*, 55.

¹⁶³ *Procès instruit*, 55.

a date or a time. Topino-Lebrun contended that he could not sufficiently establish his alibi without knowing the dates that these supposed meetings took place.¹⁶⁴ When C racchi failed to provide the necessary information, no further discussion took place.

Of the five conspirators, Diana offered the most convincing defense. When asked to respond to the fact that C racchi had designated him by name as Napoleon’s intended assassin, Diana responded that he could not refute the point. He may have said it, but saying so did not make it true. The strongest evidence of his innocence came from the testimony of Laborde, the officer who had arrested the two conspirators at the theatre. According to C racchi, he had given Diana a dagger to use against Napoleon on the morning of the attack. When Laborde arrested Diana, however, “he did not have a single weapon.”¹⁶⁵

The trial ended on 9 January 1801. Believing that C racchi and Ar na had gone to the Theatre of the Republic and of the Arts on 10 October specifically to enact the plot in question, the jury found both men guilty. They also convicted Demerville and Topino-Lebrun, though neither had been present at the opera. As for Diana, the jurors acknowledged that he had attended the theatre when the conspiracy was to take place, but they felt he had gone there for legitimate and lawful reasons. The jury foreman announced comforting news for Diana: “you are acquitted of the charges against you, and you will be immediately set free.”¹⁶⁶ The four men found guilty were sentenced to death. Crushed by the announcement of his impending death, Demerville decided to make an emotional appeal. He began by reminding the court of the suffering he had endured during his life, namely of his “incredibly terrible illness.”¹⁶⁷ When

¹⁶⁴ *Proc s instruit*, 78.

¹⁶⁵ *Proc s instruit*, 121.

¹⁶⁶ Fumey, Daiteg, and Lavigne were also acquitted. *Proc s instruit*, 378.

¹⁶⁷ *Proc s instruit*, 387.

advised by the President of the court that he did not have the right to speak at the current time, Demerville went straight to the point: “I ask that the tribunal, in order to end the anxieties that I have felt, have me shot immediately.”¹⁶⁸

On 31 January 1801, the Prefect of Police met with the conspirators to ask if they had anything to declare before facing execution. Demerville, who had been so anxious to end his life at the end of the trial, now proved desperate to save it by proposing an ultimatum. Claiming to speak on behalf of his fellow defendants as well, he offered to share information with the officer “if he had the guarantee of the First Consul, that the penalty to which he was condemned would be commuted to a simple deportation.”¹⁶⁹ The official encouraged him to share at that moment “any revelations that might concern the security of the First Consul and that of the State, promising him to put it, at that very instant, under the eyes of the Government, and that, until [the Government] learned of the information, he would receive a stay of execution.”¹⁷⁰ Given that the officer’s attempt at compromise suggested a reprieve only “until [the Government] learned of the information,” Demerville did not find the offer agreeable and remained silent. He had hoped to save his life, and those of his cohorts, not simply to postpone the execution. Aréna, Céracchi, and Topino-Lebrun categorically refused to make any statement whatsoever to officials. With the trial concluded and offers—however half-hearted—of leniency declined, the four condemned men faced the firing squad.

¹⁶⁸ *Procès instruit*, 387.

¹⁶⁹ *Procès instruit*, 549.

¹⁷⁰ *Procès instruit*, 549.

CHAPTER FOUR INFERNAL MACHINE PLOT

When the Revolution began in 1789, citizens in the Morbihan supported the abolition of feudalism. The idea of standing on the same footing as the nation's other regions was appealing. For generations prior, the Morbihan had held a unique position in feudal France. Unlike most regions, which paid dues and services in exchange for a lord's protection, the inhabitants of the Morbihan were direct subjects of the monarchy. While such distant guardianship relieved the stress of financial dues and military obligation, it added the stress of complete self-sufficiency. The region's people understood that they could count only on themselves for survival because the king was unlikely to send substantive help to remedy any trouble. Generally, if a region suffered a bad harvest, for example, its lord could appeal to the king for help, which was granted because of the services the lord provided to the monarchy. The monarchy was also anxious to placate the nobles when possible to prevent an uprising against the absolutist government in place since the reign of Louis XIV. With no one of note to deliver their plea, the people of the Morbihan seemed to pose no serious threat to the monarchy and were not, therefore, deemed worthy of the assistance.

Although the population of the Morbihan enthusiastically supported the Revolution in its earliest stages, within a year, the relationship faced an insurmountable challenge. The implementation of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy violated the religious sensibilities of the region. Viewed as an unlawful and immoral attack on the Church, the legislation "was the true, the first, if not the only cause" of the counterrevolutionary activity that erupted throughout Brittany.¹⁷¹ The entirety of the region's episcopate refused to obey, declining to swear the oath

¹⁷¹ Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal et la Chouannerie* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et Cie., 1887), 16.

requiring it “to be loyal to the nation, to the law and to the King, and to maintain with all [its] power the constitution decreed by the National Assembly and accepted by King.”¹⁷² Any religious institution whose clergy rejected the Civil Constitution faced immediate closure. Among those churches and schools victimized by the Revolutionary secularization was the College of Vannes, where twenty-year-old Georges Cadoudal was on the verge of completing his studies.

The closing of churches and the termination of religion-based education prompted many in the Morbihan to consider taking up arms against the nation. For his own part, Cadoudal rejected “the freedom that one offered in exchange for his faith.”¹⁷³ Whatever political or social advantages the Revolution promised were not sufficient to warrant the risk of eternal damnation. The announcement of the immediate conscription of 300,000 men into the Republican armies on 24 February 1793, coupled with the religious tensions that had festered for three years, was the deciding factor that sparked violent counterrevolutionary activity in the region. In a “spontaneous explosion of popular furor” the following month, 3,000 peasant insurgents attacked the nearby town of Auray.¹⁷⁴ Aiming to capture the town and its two cannons and to persuade its 300 soldiers to join the fight against the Revolution, the rebels rushed to action shouting “Vive le Roi!”¹⁷⁵ Their enthusiasm was commendable, but it could not overcome the training of the town’s soldiers. The peasants’ headlong run at the garrison, the first armed insurrection in the region, failed entirely in its mission.

¹⁷² *Archives Nationales*, AE/II/1185. Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal*, 19.

¹⁷³ Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal*, 15.

¹⁷⁴ Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal*, 49.

¹⁷⁵ Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal*, 49.

Cadoudal counted himself among the participants of the revolt. From this early point, he earned a reputation as the “soul of insurrection in the Morbihan.”¹⁷⁶ His notoriety worked against him, however, as authorities immediately began searching for him. Unsuccessful, but aware of his loyalty to his family, local representatives of the government arrested his uncle Denis in his stead. Georges soon informed his family that he intended to surrender and to take his rightful place in the prison of Auray: “I do not want anyone to suffer for me.”¹⁷⁷ Everyone, including his uncle, tried in vain to dissuade him. Reporting to the prison in person, Cadoudal found himself under arrest and his uncle’s freedom restored.

None of the insurgents remained in prison long. Most, including Cadoudal, regained their liberty within a matter of days. At the time, local political representatives were more willing to make excuses for the revolt and its participants than they were to acknowledge the seriousness of the region’s disillusionment. Rather than reporting that the government’s religious policies and conscription practices had prompted the violence, the authorities communicated to Paris that local aristocrats had orchestrated the recent event. The peasants were, they explained, witless dupes of the nobles, tricked into acting against the government and their own interests. As such, there was no need to punish anyone severely. The failure to take significant action against the insurgents allowed violence in the region to continue throughout the Revolution and into the reign of Napoleon Bonaparte.

The counterrevolutionary activity present in Brittany is frequently referred to as *chouannerie*. Despite its lengthy threat to Republican and Napoleonic government in France, the movement never amounted to “more than a series of sporadic, isolated guerrilla actions, which

¹⁷⁶ Joseph Cadoudal, *Notice sur Georges Cadoudal et le Morbihan pendant la révolution* (Paris: Imprimerie de H. Fournier, 1829), 27-28.

¹⁷⁷ Joseph Cadoudal, *Notice sur Georges*, 10.

often degenerated into pillage.”¹⁷⁸ Disheartened by the ineffectiveness of the Breton revolt at Auray, Cadoudal joined the opposition movement in the Vendée. Here, he gained experience both on the battlefield and through interaction with trained military leaders.

In November 1793, the Vendéens joined with some *chouans* to fight Republican troops while on the way to meet with the British fleet. The opposition force of approximately 30,000 easily defeated the much smaller Republican forces in several skirmishes. Despite some victories, the campaign ultimately failed. Difficult communication prevented the British and French forces from agreeing upon a meeting point. The counterrevolutionaries initially intended to make contact with the fleet at Saint-Malo, but headed in a more northern direction after their victory at Mayenne. They decided upon Granville, which was less fortified than their initial destination. The town resisted the attack more strongly than expected. Running low on ammunition and food, the counterrevolutionaries turned their focus to the surrounding areas outside Granville itself, hoping to resupply. Their findings were inadequate, and when a fire broke out in the community, the forces fled. The Republican troops pursued their opponents, inflicting thousands of casualties in the process. Although the campaign was a failure, Cadoudal distinguished himself during some of the battles and by helping to organize the otherwise chaotic retreat. He received the rank of captain in recognition of his service.

¹⁷⁸ The term “*chouannerie*” is often misused to refer to the Revolutionary opposition in both Brittany and the Vendée. The counterrevolutionaries in the Vendée benefitted from experienced military leadership and solid organization. The *chouans*, on the other hand, had neither organization nor officially trained leadership. Although they shared the same ideals and occasionally assisted the other, the two groups generally functioned independently of one another. François Furet, “Chouannerie,” in *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, edited by François Furet and Mona Ozouf (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), originally *Dictionnaire critique de la révolution française* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 3.

Vendéean losses after the failure at Granville prompted Cadoudal to return to the Morbihan. Continuing to foment opposition, he and his forces accomplished nothing toward restoring Bourbon rule and little toward creating a unified fighting force for the cause. The guerrilla bands did, however, prove a constant annoyance to garrisons of Republican troops in the region. During the night of 30 June 1794, a group of sixty armed men raided Cadoudal's parents' house where he was living.¹⁷⁹ Finding weapons and munitions in the home, the men arrested everyone at the residence: Georges, his father, his pregnant mother, his uncle Denis, his sixteen-year-old brother, Julien, and a friend. By now, the government had adopted a harsh stance against counterrevolutionary activity in the provinces, and it resulted in a lengthy prison sentence for Cadoudal and his family, unlike his first imprisonment the previous year. None of the captives received any semblance of a trial. They expected to languish in their cells until someone saw fit to execute them.

On 27 Fructidor II (13 September 1794), authorities transferred Denis from the prison to a hospital due to an illness he had contracted. Believing his uncle had a better chance of recovery and survival if he did not return to the prison and distraught over being the cause of his family's current misfortune in the first place, Cadoudal sought to obtain his family's freedom. On 7 Vendémiaire III (28 September 1794), he wrote to Bernard Thomas Tréhouart de Beaulieu, the National Convention's deputy at Brest. He declared, "I alone am guilty," explaining that his family members had played no part in his counterrevolutionary activities.¹⁸⁰ Concerned about his uncle's health, Cadoudal mentioned him specifically: "For some time, he has been in the

¹⁷⁹ The sources do not indicate whether the armed men were military troops or simply local police authorities. Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal*, 53. Joseph Cadoudal, *Notice sur Georges*, 9.

¹⁸⁰ "Documents sur la famille Cadoudal ou Cadoudal," *Revue des Provinces de l'Ouest (Bretagne, Poitou et Anjou)* 6, no. 1 (Sept 1858): 78.

hospital where, perhaps, he has already finished his unhappy days.”¹⁸¹ He had no way of knowing that Denis had, in fact, died ten days earlier. Despite the admission of personal guilt and the doleful supplication on behalf of his family, Cadoudal received no response to the letter.

With his mother nearly nine months pregnant, Cadoudal attempted again to contact Tréhouart on 12 Vendémiaire III (3 October 1794). He reiterated his family’s innocence, claiming that they “did not have even the slightest knowledge” of his activities, or even of the fact that he possessed weapons in his room.¹⁸² Tréhouart again declined to respond. At this point, Cadoudal adopted a new approach: he and the friend authorities had arrested with him escaped.¹⁸³ He had to know that his flight would do nothing to aid his family members, but he may have believed he could help them better from outside the prison.¹⁸⁴ After all, his efforts to work within legal means had failed.

With his freedom regained, Cadoudal continued leading sporadic attacks on local government strongholds. The hope of restoring the monarchy in France suffered a setback in February 1795, however, when the Vendéans removed themselves from the fight. The Treaty of La Jaunais, signed between the National Convention and the Vendéan leaders, left the *chouans* as the only organized band of Royalist forces in the country. In exchange for their

¹⁸¹ “Documents sur la famille,” 79.

¹⁸² “Documents sur la famille,” 79.

¹⁸³ The date of Georges’ escape is unknown, as there is no written account of it. Obviously unaware of Cadoudal’s future importance in French history, authorities at the prison gave little attention to his getaway and did not document it. They also reasoned that the lack of documentation would prevent the government from reprimanding them for allowing prisoners to flee. Since Georges wrote his two letters to Tréhouart while imprisoned, his escape took place at some point after 3 October 1794.

¹⁸⁴ Cadoudal was unable to resolve his family’s situation through lawful means or otherwise. Authorities transferred his mother to the hospital on 18 October 1794, where she gave birth to a son four days later. The child survived for only two days. Cadoudal’s mother did not survive complications from the pregnancy and died on 2 November. Cadoudal’s father and brother did not regain their freedom until 16 March and 3 April 1795, respectively.

official recognition of the Republican government's legitimacy, the Vendéans received several dispensations. The government agreed to the demand that it establish no local offices and post no local representatives in the region. Catholic services took place without hindrance—an arrangement that soon spread to other regions in the country. Approximately 2,000 of the fighters organized themselves into a militia under their current leadership, all in the pay of the republic. Vendéan youth received an exemption from serving in any force other than the local militia. The highest ranked of the opposition leaders received significant payments. The region also received nearly two million francs in remuneration for the costs they had accumulated during their oppositional efforts.

With the Vendéans pacified, and their own efforts producing little effect, some of the *chouan* leaders began to lose faith in their cause. When approached by some of the chiefs about the possibility of peace, the National Convention leapt at the opportunity. The government asked General Louis Lazare Hoche, who had helped negotiate the recent treaty with the Vendéans, to serve as one of its representatives at the peace talks. Recognizing that fewer than 20 percent of the opposition's leaders were interested in the treaty, Hoche complained that negotiations with so few people were pointless. Believing there was no sense in wasting time with “a simple truce, which could not last in the long run,” Hoche refused to play any role in the process.¹⁸⁵

The general was not the only person with misgivings about peace talks. The majority of *chouan* leaders found the idea of giving up the fight unacceptable. The Catholic Church and its

¹⁸⁵ Pierre Victor Jean Berthre de Bourniseaux, *Histoire des Guerres de la Vendée et des Chouans, depuis l'Année 1792 jusqu'en 1815; précédée d'une histoire politique, militaire et morale de la Vendée, d'un Abrégé de la statistique du territoire insurgé, de la Nomenclature de tous les généraux, officiers vendéens et chouans, des généraux et représentans républicains, qui ont figure dans ces guerres, et suivie d'un Recueil d'anecdotes vendéennes* (Paris: Chez Brunot-Labbe, 1819), 3: 145.

followers still faced persecution for their beliefs. The Bourbon family was living as exiles in England. The leaders did not want to abandon their position so arbitrarily. They had lost many of their supporters on the battlefield and did not want their deaths to be in vain. Cadoudal was vocal in his disapproval of peace with the government. Other leaders shared his desire to continue the fight against Revolutionary France but also understood that their men needed a break and that morale needed a boost. One of the most successful chiefs, Jean-Nicolas Stofflet, explained to his fellow *chouans* that he would only sign a treaty with the government “with the goal of giving several months of repose to his country.”¹⁸⁶ Some leaders focused more on their own personal gains when considering the treaty. The Vendéens had received a substantial amount of money, not only to cover their military costs, but also for personal use. The possibility of an individual leader receiving 150,000 francs was sufficient reason for some of them to sign peace agreements.¹⁸⁷

Despite Hoche’s refusal to involve himself and despite lackluster support among *chouans*, the National Convention and twenty-two *chouan* leaders reached an agreement on 21 April 1795.¹⁸⁸ The Treaty of La Mabilais granted the same concessions to its participants as the Treaty of La Jaunais had given the Vendéens. Although many people on both sides of the agreement expected it to fail, they likely did not expect it so quickly. Within a week and a half,

¹⁸⁶ Despite considering the benefits of the treaty, Stofflet ultimately chose not to sign the document when the government presented it. F.-L. Patu Deshautschamps, *Dix Années de Guerre Intestine présentant le tableau et l’examen raisonné des opérations des armées royalistes et républicaines dans les départements de l’Ouest, depuis de mois de mars 1793 jusqu’au 1^{er} août 1802* (Paris: Imprimerie et Librairie Militaire de G.-Laguionie, 1840), 491.

¹⁸⁷ Bourniseaux, *Histoire des Guerres*, 3: 145n1.

¹⁸⁸ One of the first leaders to sign the treaty, Louis Chantreau de la Joubarderie, withdrew his agreement to the document shortly after its negotiation. Charles-Louis Chassin, *Les Pacifications de l’Ouest, 1794-1801*, Vol. 1: *La Jaunaye, La Mabilais, Saint-Florent, Quiberon* (Paris: Paul Dupont, 1896), 308.

two of the *chouan* signatories were assassinated. Perhaps believing that the peace extended to them despite not having signed it, other *chouan* leaders found themselves under arrest for actions they had taken against the republic. Angered by the government's failure to uphold the treaty, though not surprised by it, Cadoudal wrote to Joseph-Geneviève de Puisaye, a *chouan* living in London, complaining about the violence. Puisaye was in close communication with Louis, Count of Provence and Charles, Count of Artois, the brothers of Louis XVI, who were next in line for the Bourbon throne.¹⁸⁹ With the blessing of his royal contacts, Puisaye responded, denouncing those who had signed the treaty in the first place and disclosing to Cadoudal, now his most trusted contact in France, that a landing in the Morbihan was pending.

The Count of Artois had long hoped to land in France backed by émigré soldiers. The English supported the idea, hoping to quash once and for all the dangerous wave of Republicanism in France. Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger appointed Puisaye to develop the plan of attack. The two had become friends during Puisaye's stay in London, and Pitt believed he was more likely to take orders from British overseers than anyone else the Count of Artois might appoint. Unwilling to allow the future of his family to rest in the hands of someone he did not know or trust, the Count of Artois appointed Louis Charles d'Hervilly to supervise the planning and even the expedition itself.¹⁹⁰ So began the troubles for the Quiberon expedition.

¹⁸⁹ The Count of Provence eventually gained control of France as Louis XVIII after Napoleon's abdications in 1814 and 1815. The Count of Artois ruled as Charles X after his brother's death in 1824.

¹⁹⁰ Both the Count of Artois and his brother, the Count of Provence, were personally acquainted with d'Hervilly and his services to the French monarchy. D'Hervilly had stayed by the side of Louis XVI and his family on 10 August 1792 when Parisians attacked the Tuileries palace. He accompanied the royals to the Manège, where they surrendered themselves to the mercy of the National Assembly. When the government placed the family under arrest, d'Hervilly left the country, taking up residence in England.

Puisaye and d'Hervilly were diametrically opposed in most things, including political ideology and ideas about the best way to organize a landing in France. Puisaye had served in both the Estates-General and the National Constituent Assembly during the earliest days of the Revolution. He turned against the Revolution only when the possibility of maintaining a constitutional monarchy dissolved. On the other hand, d'Hervilly preferred a return to the standards of the *ancien régime*, hoping for a Bourbon restoration and the complete nullification of all Revolutionary policies. During the planning of the Royalist invasion of France, the two men butted heads constantly. Puisaye proposed a surprise landing, after which his troops would meet up with Royalist supporters in the region and work to seize as many towns as quickly as possible. D'Hervilly favored a more systematic approach. The best plan of attack, he argued, was to land and solidify support for the invasion at a single point. Once supplied and organized, the forces could attack and seize towns in the region, continuing to gather more support as they did so. The two leaders bickered for several days. Eventually, d'Hervilly submitted to Puisaye's leadership.

The English had promised their support for the invasion, but it was less substantive than the French expected. Anticipating supplies, money, and manpower, Puisaye was disappointed to receive only ships and weapons. The government failed to assign any English troops to the expedition. Puisaye attempted to rally the émigrés in England but raised only 3,500 men. He pushed forward with the attack, however, landing his troops on mainland France on 28 June. As he had hoped, approximately 2,500 *chouan* fighters joined his forces upon the debarkation. Keeping with the plan, the group attacked and seized as many coastal towns as quickly as possible. The goal was to create a large enough stronghold in the region to allow the Count of Artois himself to land and to continue the fighting. General Hoche and his troops, already

garrisoned in the assailed region, had no trouble quashing the Royalist forces. In just over a week, the Republicans regained control of each of the captured towns. On 17 July, nearly 2,000 émigré reinforcements, led by General Charles Eugène Gabriel de Sombreuil, arrived at Quiberon from England. They captured the fort in the town but enjoyed no further success. When General Hoche ordered an attack on the fort, British ships in the harbor opened fire, killing everyone in the vicinity. As Royalists, Republicans, and civilians alike succumbed to the barrage, Puisaye ordered his men to escape to the British ships.¹⁹¹

Although many of Puisaye's men reached the harbor, their retreat stranded Sombreuil and his forces in the fort. Along with the abandoned soldiers were several thousand local citizens and family members of the émigrés who had invaded from England.¹⁹² Recognizing the hopelessness of the situation, Sombreuil arranged to talk with Hoche about the possibility of saving the lives of those in his care. In the hope of preventing any further bloodshed, Sombreuil

¹⁹¹ The circumstances surrounding Puisaye's decision to call for a retreat are suspicious. He was the very first of the Frenchmen to re-embark on the English ships. To combat claims of cowardice, he explained that he had needed to ensure his safe escape in order to save the correspondence he had on his person at the time. According to his close friend, the Count of Vauban, if he was unable to save the mission itself, "he might as well at least save his correspondence with England, with our Princes." Cadoudal, for his part, was unconvinced by Puisaye's explanations. He believed Puisaye escaped in order to save his own life, not in order to save the lives of his men. Many of the royalists present at Quiberon viewed Puisaye's escape as treason, as he had betrayed them and their cause. Cadoudal once explained that regardless of his guilt or innocence, Puisaye had lost the confidence of the royalists in the area. He added, "I swear that, personally, I have never had confidence in him, and that I have, in fact, always hated him." Jacques Anne Joseph Le Prestre, Count of Vauban, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la guerre de la Vendée* (Paris: La Maison de Commission en Librairie, 1806), 131. Louis George de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal*, 124.

¹⁹² Sources provide different accounts of the number of people cornered in the fort at Quiberon. On the low end is Charles-Louis Chassin, who counts "1,602 émigrés and 5,000 soldiers, *chouans*, etc." Théodore-Gaston-Joseph Chasle de la Touche provides the highest count at "about eight to ten thousand people of all ages and all sexes." Charles-Louis Chassin, *Le Général Hoche à Quiberon* (Paris: Dupont, 1897), 144. Chasle de la Touche, *Relation du désastre de Quiberon en 1795 et refutation des souvenirs historiques de M. Rouget de l'Isle sur ce désastre* (Paris: Delloye, 1838), 119.

informed Hoche, “The men that I command *are determined to die in the fort, their weapons in their hands: let them board the ships, you will save French blood.*”¹⁹³ Understandably, Hoche declined the proposition. He could not allow an invasion force from England to go unpunished. He did, however, promise to spare the lives of the women, children, and elderly in the fort. As for the soldiers, Hoche allegedly promised to treat them as prisoners of war who had capitulated during the fighting.¹⁹⁴ On 21 July, Sombreuil accepted Hoche’s terms and surrendered the fort. On the same day, Republican guards marched the non-combatants from the fort to Plouharnel, where they regained their freedom. Troops led Sombreuil and his men to the prison at Auray. On the following day, fully expecting to receive food and medical treatment under the terms of their surrender, 400 soldiers who had fallen behind the rest of the group because of various injuries arrived “voluntarily and without escort” at the prison.¹⁹⁵

The stragglers would have fared better if they had maintained their freedom. The lenient treatment Sombreuil had promised them was not forthcoming. According to a letter allegedly written by Sombreuil on the day of his execution, he only surrendered his troops because of his belief that the government would spare their lives.¹⁹⁶ He trusted “that those who were émigrés would be prisoners of war, and spared like the others: I alone was excepted.”¹⁹⁷ During his trial, he implored some of the soldiers who had been present at Quiberon to attest that he had

¹⁹³ Chasle de la Touche, *Relation du Désastre de Quiberon en 1795 et refutation des souvenirs historiques de M. Rouget de l’Isle sur de désastre* (Paris: Delloye, 1838), 115.

¹⁹⁴ There is no official record of what, if any, promises Hoche gave Sombreuil.

¹⁹⁵ De la Touche, *Relation du Désastre*, 121.

¹⁹⁶ There is some doubt as to whether Sombreuil actually wrote the letter himself. Having read the letter, Puisaye contended that Sombreuil was not, in fact, the author. *Mémoires de Tous: Collection de Souvenirs Contemporains tendant à établir la vérité dans l’histoire*, vol. 2: *Mémoires de Rouget de Lisle, de M. le Comte Thibaudeau, et M. Amédée Gabourd, du Maréchal Augereau, de M. Peuchet* (Paris: Alphonse Levavasseur, 1834), 117.

¹⁹⁷ *Mémoires de Tous*, 2: 116.

surrendered his men as prisoners of war. No one responded to support his claim.¹⁹⁸ If General Hoche had, in fact, promised to spare the lives of Sombreuil's men, he had done so without authority and without legal grounds. The Republican government considered the émigrés outlaws, not subject to any of the rights or privileges of French citizens or to those of captured soldiers. If Hoche had offered the status of prisoner of war to the émigrés, his actions were illegal, however moral they may have been. Upholding the laws of the National Convention, a military commission sentenced Sombreuil and his closest associates to death on 28 July 1795.

The expedition to Quiberon had been a failure from its inception. The inability to form a lasting stronghold, coupled with the capture of Sombreuil's troops, prompted the Count of Artois to decline landing personally in France. He remained in England, much to the chagrin of his supporters on the continent. Cadoudal, who fought at Quiberon, distinguished himself by saving "from a grisly massacre thousands of women, elderly and children who had come from all parts of the Morbihan" to show their Royalist support.¹⁹⁹ With Sombreuil executed and Puisaye shamed for his seemingly selfish and treasonous retreat, Cadoudal found himself at the very head of *chouan* leadership. He continued to serve the Royalist cause through military actions in the Morbihan and through diplomacy in England when in the country. Tense periods of ceasefire between the *chouans* and Republicans occurred occasionally, but even signed treaties were not sufficient to end the fighting entirely.

There were only two significant pauses in Cadoudal's active fight against the Republican government. The first came with the announcement of the Consular government's creation in November 1799. Witnessing the centralization of political power in the hands of three Directors,

¹⁹⁸ *Mémoires de Tous*, 2: 113.

¹⁹⁹ G. Lenotre, *Georges Cadoudal* (Agnières: Archéos, 2012), np.

but aware that only Bonaparte truly held any political authority, Royalists hoped the new regime would serve as a stepping stone toward the reinstatement of the Bourbon monarchy. With hopes high, the Count of Provence ordered his supporters to remain peaceful, yet vigilant, while he communicated with the First Consul about the political future of the nation. On 20 February 1800, the hopeful royal wrote to Bonaparte, acknowledging his services to France and assuring him that he would not be forgotten: "Save France from her own madness, and you will have fulfilled the first wish of my heart; restore to that country her king, and future generations shall bless your memory. You will always be too necessary to the state that I should deem important appointments sufficient requital of my grandfather's obligation and my own."²⁰⁰ The writing implied a sense of confidence that Napoleon's plan had been to restore the monarchy all along. In his response, the First Consul turned history's memory around on the would-be monarch: if he were willing to sacrifice his own personal interests for those of France, history would remember him. The same act would spare the loss of 100,000 lives that would be lost, Napoleon explained, if the Count of Provence attempted to regain control of the country.²⁰¹

Painfully aware that the Consular government was not going to pave the way for his return to power, the Count of Provence made arrangements for Cadoudal to renew his actions. On 3 June 1800, Cadoudal landed at Calais with 30,000 British troops. British Prime Minister Pitt promised the *chouan* leader an additional 30,000 soldiers if he were able to raise his own

²⁰⁰ Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, *Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte from the French of M. Fauvelet de Bourrienne and a Word Painting of the Battle of Waterloo by Sir Edward Creasy, Together with a Vivid Description of Napoleon's Parting with Josephine by Madame de Rémusat and the Diary of Rear-Admiral Sir George Cockburn during Napoleon's Passage to St. Helena and a Copy of Napoleon's Will*, translated and edited by John S. Memes (New York: P. F. Collier, 1892), 1: 263.

²⁰¹ Martyn Lyons, *Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 131.

force of 60,000. While Cadoudal gathered and organized his fighting force, Napoleon's victory at the Battle of Marengo on 14 June 1800 prompted the second pause in the effort against the Republican government. Napoleon proved that luck had not abandoned him on the battlefield, and he was the first general to strike a major blow against the forces of the Second Coalition.²⁰² With the nation's military opponents frustrated, Frenchmen overwhelmingly supported their leader and his Consular regime. Discouraged by the setback and unconvinced that military efforts could, in fact, defeat Bonaparte, Cadoudal turned to other means of ridding France of its allegedly illegitimate authority.

In London, Cadoudal organized a meeting with several of his most trusted *chouan* officers currently living in England. He proposed that they travel to Paris to lay the groundwork for a conspiracy, funded by the British, to restore the Bourbons to power, but shared no specific details about how to accomplish the goal. Citing the fact that he was older than his cohorts, Pierre Robinault, most commonly known as Saint-Réjant, insisted on being in charge once the group arrived in Paris. Over the course of November and into the first days of December 1800, five conspirators entered the French capital, renting apartments or taking up with close friends and family members.²⁰³

On 5 December 1800, Saint-Réjant received a letter from Cadoudal in England, which he interpreted as a call to action. In the writing, Cadoudal lauded the *chouan* fighters responsible

²⁰² The Second Coalition included Britain, Austria, Russia, Turkey, Portugal, the Vatican, and Naples.

²⁰³ Most of the conspirators operated under numerous aliases. For the purposes of this work, each will be identified by the name most commonly associated with him. In the interest of full disclosure, the conspirators and their aliases are as follows: 1) Joseph-Pierre Picot-Limoelan, also known as Beaumont-Bourleroi; 2) Pierre Robinault, generally known as Saint-Réjant, also called Pierrot, Pierre Saint-Martin, Soyer or Sollier; 3) Édouard Lahaye, alias Saint-Hilaire; 4) Joyau, who is not identified by any other names; 5) Hyde, also not referred to in any more detail.

for the recent murder of regicide Yves-Marie Audrein, the Bishop of Quimper.²⁰⁴ He encouraged his cohorts in Paris to look to the assassins as role-models, praising their dedication to the Bourbons and their “coolness and audacity.”²⁰⁵ The letter also explained that someone would meet with Saint-Réjant soon, bringing additional funds to support the “execution of the *great plan*.”²⁰⁶ With people to imitate and more money on the way, Saint-Réjant believed the time was now to take action against the First Consul.

Without further orders, Saint-Réjant concocted a violent plan to end Napoleon’s rule. He looked to the recent machinations of Chevalier and Veycer, two Jacobin dissidents.²⁰⁷ Police had arrested the two men and a handful of their accomplices on 8 November 1800. Chevalier had designed a machine that he intended to detonate, thus assassinating the First Consul, and providing the opportunity to restore the government to its 1793 form. Given their differing political ideologies, it is unlikely that Saint-Réjant communicated personally with the bomb-maker. He did not possess the plans for the exact machine, but the existence of such a weapon was inspiration enough. He authorized François-Jean Carbon to purchase items necessary to create their own explosive device and to ensure that they were not conspicuous while preparing it. Carbon obtained several blue uniforms similar to those worn by the city’s water carriers. On

²⁰⁴ Audrein had taught Maximilien Robespierre and Camille Desmoulins while employed at the college Louis-le-Grand prior to the Revolution. Once the movement began, he served as a representative of the Morbihan in both the Legislative and Conventional assemblies. During Louis XVI’s trial for treason, Audrein found that the king was, in fact, guilty. He voted for the ratification of the judgment by the French people, which did not pass. He ultimately voted for the monarch’s death, though he also voted in favor of a stay of execution. Prosper Hémon, *Audrein, Yves-Marie: député du Morbihan à l’Assemblée Législative et à la Convention Nationale, Évêque Constitutionnel du Finistère (1741-1800)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1903), 12.

²⁰⁵ Charles François Marchand de Breuil, *Journées mémorables de la Révolution française* (Paris: L’editeur des Journées mémorables, 1826), 5: 51.

²⁰⁶ De Breuil, *Journées mémorables*, 5: 51.

²⁰⁷ Chevalier and Veycer are not identified by any other names in the source material.

17-18 December, he found and purchased a cart and a black horse.²⁰⁸ Saint-Réjant believed he had determined the best opportunity for action. The First Consul planned to attend the opening performance of Joseph Haydn's *La Création* at the Théâtre des Arts on Christmas Eve. The conspirator passed the afternoon of 22 December walking the streets between the theatre and the Tuileries palace searching for the perfect location at which to launch the attack.

On the fated day, Saint-Réjant positioned the group's horse-drawn cart carrying a barrel in the rue Saint Nicaise. When parked, the cart and its contents drew no one's attention. Looking like "an old bucket, such as are borne by the water carriers," the barrel was like any that could be seen on the streets in Paris.²⁰⁹ He stood by the cart, waiting for the signal from "a person," which was to inform him that the First Consul had left the Tuileries palace.²¹⁰ The indication never came. Concerned over the delay, Saint-Réjant decided to investigate, but did not want to leave the cart unattended. Promising to be quick, he employed fourteen-year-old Marianne Peusol to hold the horse's reigns until he returned.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ *Procès instruit par le Tribunal Criminel du Département de la Seine, contre les nommés Saint-Réjant, Carbon, et autres, prévenus de conspiration contre la personne du premier Consul; suivi du jugement du Tribunal de Cassation qui a rejeté le pourvoi des condamnés* (Paris: Imprimerie de la République, Floréal an IX), 1: 19.

²⁰⁹ Laure Junot, *Memoirs of the Duchess d'Abrantès (Madame Junot)* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1832), 363.

²¹⁰ *Procès Instruit*, 1: xlvii.

²¹¹ There are discrepancies concerning the payment Marianne received for her service. Accounts from the time, including the girl's mother's testimony in court, explain that she received 12 sous. At least one modern account explains instead that the girl received "a piece of bread." The monetary payment is more convincing. Yet another source contends that Saint-Réjant did not hire anyone to hold the reigns, but that the detail has been added to history to vilify further the people responsible for the explosion. *Procès Instruit*, 1: 311. Michel Franceschi and Ben Weider, *Napoléon: Défenseur immolé de la paix* (Paris: Economica, 2007), translated by Jonathan M. House as *The Wars against Napoleon: Debunking the Myth of the Napoleonic Wars* (New York: Savas Beatie, 2007), 25. Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal*, 284.

In the meantime, at the Tuileries palace, Napoleon prepared to leave for the theatre with his family and some close friends and advisors.²¹² As everyone piled into the carriages, Napoleon's aide de camp, Jean Rapp, "who was not usually so observant of the perfect agreement of colours in a lady's dress," commented to Josephine that her shawl did not complement the rest of her ensemble.²¹³ Known for her attentiveness to such matters, she took several minutes to correct the oversight. The procession of carriages departed later than planned, around 8:15 p.m., and with a larger gap than normal between Napoleon's coach and that of his wife.

Still with no signal from his missing cohort, Saint-Réjant perceived for himself that the First Consul was approaching. He quickly rushed back to the cart. Ahead of Napoleon's carriage was a detachment of grenadiers in charge of the First Consul's security. Nicolas Durand, a grenadier at the head of the patrol, noticed a cart "blocking about half the passage."²¹⁴ He pushed by it to clear the street, prompting the horse to shift its weight and to take several steps.²¹⁵ Saint-Réjant did not notice the disruption in the barrel's position and lit its fuse before running for cover. Several seconds passed before the detonation rocked the quarter.

²¹² The performance of Haydn's work took place at the same theatre where Céracchi and his accomplices had attempted to assassinate Napoleon on 10 October 1800.

²¹³ Junot, *Memoirs*, 362.

²¹⁴ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 207.

²¹⁵ Durand testified that he "advanced toward the driver of this car, threatening with my sabre," before pushing his way through to clear the street. Saint-Réjant's own account does not include threats from a grenadier. Instead, he explains simply that "a grenadier pushed [the cart] hard against the wall and disturbed it." In yet another source, the author recounts what she was told by a witness to the explosion. In her version of events, the grenadier "struck the poor mare smartly on the haunches with the flat of his sabre, which set her in motion." Given the gruesome death of Marianne Peusol who was still holding the horse's reins when the bomb detonated, Saint-Réjant's account of the cart's repositioning is most convincing. If Saint-Réjant had been seated on the cart for Durand to recognize him as its driver, Marianne would no longer have been supervising it. *Procès Instruit*, 1: 79, 207. Junot, *Memoirs*, 363.

The explosion launched people and debris into the air or threw them against buildings. Windows of the surrounding houses shattered, showering everyone inside and out with glass. Tiles and chunks off dozens of buildings assaulted the bystanders below. In addition to the physical damage, the explosion severely wounded fifty persons and killed approximately thirty. Among them was Marianne, who, still holding the reins of Saint-Réjant's horse, had met with an instant and violent death.²¹⁶ The force of the explosion tossed Napoleon's carriage into the air, though no one inside it came to any harm. Unsure of the condition of his wife and other attendants, he nevertheless ordered his driver to hasten toward the theatre without stopping. The shock almost caused Josephine to faint, but she was unharmed. Hortense, Napoleon's step-daughter, had received a cut on her arm from the glass of the carriage's windows. The women's carriage, too, continued on its way to the theatre.

Nearly suffocated under a pile of rubble, Saint-Réjant regained consciousness after several minutes. He had not fled far enough away to escape the blast. Upon waking, he learned immediately that his efforts had failed. Bonaparte had survived the explosion. As inconspicuously as possible, the would-be assassin made his way to the home of the Leguilloux family on rue des Prouvaires, where he had rented a room. Safely inside, he implored them to find a doctor who could help with his wounds. They obtained the services of Doctor Basile-Jacques-Louis Collin, who had treated Saint-Réjant previously for a pulmonary catarrh.²¹⁷ When the doctor arrived, his patient was "spitting blood, leaking it from his nostrils, breathing with pain, a concentrated pulse, without any kind of bruise or blow to the outside, and suffering from

²¹⁶ According to her mother's testimony, the girl's condition was so gruesome that officials refused to allow her to view the body. Instead, the mother's brother was tasked with identifying her remains. *Procès Instruit*, 1: 311.

²¹⁷ *Procès instruit*, 2: 222.

severe abdominal pain, sore eyes and deafness in his left ear.”²¹⁸ Saint-Réjant took to his bed for several days to heal from his injuries and to remain off the streets where the police were actively investigating the scene and looking for witnesses and suspects.

Within the theatre, the audience had heard only “thirty bars of the oratorio” when the explosion briefly interrupted the music.²¹⁹ Surprised by the sound, the audience speculated as to its cause and meaning. Some believed it was celebratory cannon fire, as was common when France’s military won an important battle or captured a key city. Others, assuming the worst, believed it was some kind of attack. Several minutes passed before the First Consul arrived at the theatre and took his seat. Seeming as calm and composed as ever, he eased the crowd’s fears. Only when Josephine and Hortense arrived in their emotional and frazzled state did rumors resume.²²⁰ When the audience learned that an attack on the First Consul had, in fact, caused the disruption, “women were seen choking with sobs, men trembling with rage; all united heart and hand to prove that in such circumstances no political differences can create a difference in the code of honour.”²²¹ Napoleon bore the applause and adulations of the audience gracefully before seating himself to enjoy the performance. After only approximately fifteen minutes, however, he called for Minister of Police Joseph Fouché and returned to the Tuileries palace.

²¹⁸ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 42.

²¹⁹ Junot, *Memoirs*, 359.

²²⁰ A rumor spread throughout the audience that the conspirators’ initial plan had been to murder Napoleon while he attended the show. According to the gossip, “the conspirators had at first endeavoured to lay their train at the door of the Opera, in which case the entire theatre would have been blown up.” There were regulations in place, however, that would have prevented a carriage from maintaining such a position once the show began. Although the rumor presents a terrifying prospect, there is no evidence that Saint-Réjant and his cohorts considered such action. Junot, *Memoirs*, 361.

²²¹ Junot, *Memoirs*, 360.

Officials had yet to collect any evidence with which to identify the perpetrators of the attack, as less than an hour had passed. The First Consul did not need—or want—evidence to convince himself who had authorized the attempt on his life. In his mind, he had identified and convicted the guilty men already: “This is the work of the Jacobins! . . . Neither nobles, nor priests, nor Chouans are implicated here. Since we cannot chain, we must crush them. France must be purged of such disgusting filth. No pity for miscreants!”²²² As rash as his conclusion was, it was not without reason. The general consensus among the population and government officials was that the Royalists would not deign to murder the First Consul in the manner employed on the rue Saint Nicaise. Overtly violent, the attack did not allow any possibility for Napoleon to defend himself. Parisians believed that any assassination attempts undertaken by the Royalists would utilize more honorable means. Likewise, the Jacobins had previously proven themselves willing to plot the assassination of the First Consul. Joseph Céracchi and his Republican cohorts had planned to murder Napoleon on 10 October 1800. Because the plan had failed, the public assumed that the most recent attack was simply a second attempt by the same group. The fact that both plots centered on the opening performance of an opera further bolstered the belief.

For the first week of the investigation, evidence against the Republicans continued to mount. One of the most convincing indications of Royalist innocence, and, therefore, of Jacobin guilt, was information gleaned from the interrogation of known *chouan* leader Louis Auguste Victor, Count of Ghaisnes de Bourmont, at the Ministry of Police. A week after the explosion, Fouché ordered Bourmont’s arrest. When questioned about the plot, the Count emphatically denied knowing anything about it, proclaiming not only his own innocence but also that of any

²²² Bourrienne, *Memoirs of Napoleon*, 1: 298.

and all *chouans* and Royalists. His group, he explained, “had no interest in disposing of the First Consul, his death would not profit the group in any manner.”²²³ On the day following Fouché’s interrogation of Bourmont, Napoleon spoke with the *chouan* personally. The Count continued to swear that the Royalists were not responsible for the attack and that he did not, in fact, know of any conspiracy in the works. Convinced, the First Consul ordered Bourmont’s release.

Fouché and his deputy, Pierre François Réal, believed from the outset that the Royalists were responsible for the plot. They never found evidence linking Bourmont personally to the conspiracy, but they believed he communicated frequently with the conspirators and other suspects, warning them when the police were on their track. To support his conclusion of Royalist guilt and Bourmont’s complicity in the matter, Fouché pointed to the disappearance of Carbon, Saint-Réjant, Joseph-Pierre Picot-Limoelan, and a handful of other *chouan* activists, whom the police had placed under surveillance prior to the explosion. He argued with his critics: “Only tell me where Monsieur de Limoelan and Monsieur Saint-Réjant are. If the attack is Jacobin, why have they hidden themselves so carefully since that day?”²²⁴

Few believed Fouché’s claim that the police had watched the men before the attack. The minister’s personal opponents condemned him, arguing “the life of the First Consul would no longer be safe in his hands.”²²⁵ They believed that he had ignored the plot until it blew up in his face because of his own connections to the Jacobins. The argument is illogical. There was no

²²³ Germain Sarrut and B. Saint-Edme, *Notice pour servir à la biographie de M. le Maréchal Comte de Bourmont* (Paris: Imprimerie de P. Baudouin, 1842), 33.

²²⁴ Pierre-Marie Desmarest, *Témoignages historiques, de quinze ans de haute police sous Napoléon* (Paris: Alphonse Levavasseur, 1833), 43.

²²⁵ Adolphe Thiers, *Histoire du Consulat et de l’Empire, faisant suite à l’histoire de la Révolution française* (Paris: Jouvot, 1884), translated by D. Forbes Campbell as *History of the Consulate and the Empire of France under Napoleon* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1893-1894), 1: 445.

reason to deny the warning signs of a Royalist attack if Fouché wanted to protect his Jacobin friends. One would expect him to pay even more attention to Royalist actions if he were attempting to save his own contacts in the Jacobin party. The popular opinion among Parisians echoed that of Fouché's foes.²²⁶ They feared a return to political uncertainty and instability if dissidents destroyed the Consulate or murdered the First Consul. If officials were aware that a group of people—regardless of the identity—intended to murder the First Consul through such violent means, why had they not taken action before the bomb exploded? The question is a valid one.

In a report to the three Consuls dated 31 January 1801, Fouché explained all he knew about the conspiracy *prior* to the explosion on the rue Saint Nicaise. He was aware that Cadoudal had sent several agents to Paris. He believed, however, that they arrived “without a set plan, but with the goal and intention of availing themselves of any favorable circumstances in order to rekindle the fire of royalist insurrection.”²²⁷ From the very moment that Saint-Réjant and Limoelan settled in the capital city, they were under police surveillance. Police also watched Carbon's activities as soon as he began associating with Cadoudal's agents. Despite his claims that “the police, whose invisible hands surrounded the criminals, heard all their conversations, followed all their steps,” Fouché neglected to arrest the men before they could enact their violent plan.²²⁸ He justified his inaction by arguing that he had wanted to catch the men with physical evidence of their plan, rather than to act solely on hearsay and speculation.²²⁹ His reasoning was sound but dangerous. In an age when mere suspicion of a crime could land someone in prison,

²²⁶ Desmarest, *Témoignages*, 33.

²²⁷ Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal*, 286.

²²⁸ *Procès Instruit*, 1: v.

²²⁹ *Procès Instruit*, 1: v.

the safe move would have been to arrest the *chouans* as soon as he recognized that a plot was afoot. His decision to wait for concrete proof of a specific plan cost the lives of dozens of Parisian citizens and nearly that of the First Consul.

Determined to take quick action, even as the police still worked to locate the perpetrators, Napoleon rejected the creation of a special tribunal to try the criminals after their discovery. Instead, he launched a seemingly unlawful attack against the Jacobins. He covered his actions with a thin veil of legality, however, by using a *senatus-consulte*, dated 4 January 1801, to order the persecution. The resolution allowed the government to deport, without trial, anyone suspected of threatening the nation's laws or freedom. Implementing the new law, Napoleon ordered Fouché to draw up a list of Jacobins to face immediate and severe punishment for their role in the most recent attempt on his life.

It is at this point that the argument of Fouché's opponents becomes valid. Not wanting his closest associates caught in the web of unwarranted punishment, he worked to keep their names off the list. He included the names of only the most vocal and notorious remaining Jacobins. "All these men," the minister argued, "have not taken up the dagger, but all are universally known to be capable of pointing it, and of using it."²³⁰ When completed, the list condemned 130 supposed enemies of the state to exile in Cayenne and the Seychelles without trial or any opportunity to clear their names.²³¹

Some sources have argued that Napoleon's banishment of the innocent men marked the "first time that he had acted in defiance of the law [through] an act of vengeful spite against

²³⁰ Thiers, *Histoire*, 1: 454.

²³¹ Archives Nationales, F/7/6271.

those who had dared to challenge his authority.”²³² Although Napoleon did not use the standard process for enacting laws to exile the Jacobins, he had not acted illegally. According to the Constitution of the Year VIII, he was within his right to make such an order via a *senatus-consulte*, which did not require approval of the legislative assemblies. It was not an illegal move, but it was certainly a step toward consolidating political power in himself, with no concern for the assemblies or his two fellow Consuls.

The action against the Jacobins was arbitrary not in terms of legality but because it attacked innocent citizens. In his outburst to the Council of State on the day after the attempted assassination, Napoleon acknowledged his desire to purge France of his enemies. The First Consul simply wanted to rid himself of anyone who might speak against him or his regime. He had exiled the men not for their involvement in the attack on Christmas Eve but because of their supposedly inherent conspiratorial nature. The document ordering their punishment expressed this idea clearly. The men included on the list “had not ceased to conspire against the state since the moment they lost the power that they had usurped.”²³³ Charged with no individual act of criminality, the men faced punishment solely for political ideologies that conflicted with those of the First Consul.

When Fouché presented indisputable proof that the *chouans* had orchestrated the attack on 3 Nivôse, he asked Napoleon to repeal the banishment of the 130 Republicans. Bonaparte declined. He argued that innocence in the infernal machine plot did not equate to innocence in all things. The men deserved their punishment “for all that they have done, for all that they

²³² Alan Forrest, *Napoleon: Life, Legacy, and Image, A Biography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2011), 152.

²³³ Archives Nationales, F/7/6271.

might yet do.”²³⁴ Feeling no remorse over his decision, Napoleon admitted that he was “pleased . . . to be rid of the Jacobin staff.”²³⁵ The First Consul was willing to acknowledge, however, that his initial suspicions concerning the guilty party had been incorrect. Although the two men butted heads throughout his rule, Napoleon openly praised the minister’s intuition and detective work. To the chagrin of Fouché’s detractors, the First Consul admitted that he had been the only one to understand the situation immediately. “He was right,” Napoleon announced, “his opinion was better than that of the others.”²³⁶

The physical evidence at the scene of the crime was significant. Police collected dozens of pieces of the cart and various parts of the horse’s corpse. Within a week, numerous witnesses, including the people who sold the property, identified the remnants. Based on the testimony, Fouché deduced that the man responsible for the purchases was Carbon. He sent for the widow Catherine-Jean Vallon, Carbon’s sister, and her two teenage daughters, with whom the suspect had recently lived. During her initial interrogation, Catherine explained that her brother had left Paris nearly a month earlier and that he had left her two barrels full of peas and lentils. Investigators searched the Vallon home while its residents answered questions about their relative. The officers found four blue shirts identical to those the witnesses claimed the conspirators had worn. They also discovered not the barrels of legumes Catherine had described, but “a barrel containing six kilograms (twelve pounds) of very fine powder, a packet of powder, [and] some cartridges.”²³⁷ When questioned about the shirts, Catherine lied, telling the police that they belonged to her late husband. As more information came to light, she ultimately

²³⁴ Thiers, *Histoire*, 1: 455.

²³⁵ François Guizot and Henriette Elizabeth Guizot de Witt, *France*, translated by Robert Black (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, 1898), 7: 39.

²³⁶ Guizot, *France*, 7: 39.

²³⁷ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 19.

confessed that they did, in fact, belong to her brother and his friends. She had tried to protect her brother because she believed he had been tricked by his cohorts into participating in the plot.

Carbon's two nieces, Joséphine and Madeleine, were more cooperative. They described numerous meetings between their uncle and his accomplices. The Vallons frequently laundered the men's clothes for them, giving them a legitimate reason to come to the house. During these visits, the girls overheard conversations among the men, despite their efforts to speak quietly. The two teenagers also explained seeing correspondence from some of the suspects addressed to their uncle. Even more useful, the two provided Carbon's current address.

On the morning of 18 January 1801, police arrested Carbon. Throughout the day, officers interrogated him about the plot and his involvement. He denied everything. When confronted, however, with the evidence police had collected from the rue Saint Nicaise and the news that at least fifteen witnesses had identified him specifically, he changed his story. He confessed to buying the cart, horse, and barrel. He did not purchase the gunpowder, but, as evidenced from the findings at his sister's home, he had stored it. Carbon also pointed police in the right direction in order to find Saint-Réjant.

Officers arrived at the home of the widow Jourdan, where Saint-Réjant supposedly lived, on the morning of 19 January. She told them that she had had a tenant named Soyer but that he had left suddenly the previous evening. Later that evening, a man named Saint-Victor arrived to inform Soyer that *le Petit-François* was in police custody.²³⁸ When officers searched the apartment Soyer had rented on the third floor, they found his clothes and other belongings strewn about, indicating a hasty evacuation. They interrogated the widow's daughter, Marie-Antoinette,

²³⁸ The sources identify Saint-Victor by only one other name, Coster or Coster-Saint-Victor.

who identified numerous associates of Soyer, including Carbon, Saint-Victor and Limoelan.²³⁹ She also advised them that she delivered letters to the Leguilloux residence for Soyer during the previous month. On the following morning, the widow Jourdan saw the police approaching to continue their investigation. She threw herself out of the third-story window onto the street below. The sudden and violent action killed her, prompting immediate speculation that she had been privy to the conspiracy.

The next residence visited by investigators was that of the Leguilloux family. Its members made no effort to hide the activities of their recent tenant, whom they knew as Soyer. He had joined them approximately a week before the explosion and had taken his leave a day or two afterwards. They described and named as many of his associates as they could remember, including Doctor Collin. Within the home, police found Saint-Réjant's clothing and two letters, one addressed to him and one with no names. Even as the family faced questions at the Ministry of Police, Saint-Réjant returned to their home. Aware that police were closing in on him, he hoped to gather his belongings before finding safer refuge. As he left the home on 28 January, police arrested him.

Carbon and Saint-Réjant, two of most intimately involved conspirators, were now in police custody. Their accomplice, Limoelan, had disappeared, much as he had done on Christmas Eve when he failed to signal that the First Consul had left the Tuileries palace. Without a doubt, it was these men who had purchased the materials for the explosive device, who had designed, built and detonated it. The identity of the plot's actual author, however, is not so clear. Sources present five possibilities: the English government, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies William Windham specifically, Georges Cadoudal, Limoelan, and Saint-Réjant.

²³⁹ She also named Doctor Collin, Joyau and Saint-Hilaire. *Procès Instruit*, 1: xix.

Englishmen had a more positive reaction to news of the attack on the First Consul than the citizens of France. Although the means through which the conspirators had acted shocked many Englishmen, some had no issue with the violence. As an illegitimate ruler who had usurped political control through underhanded means, Napoleon deserved whatever came his way. William Cobbett's *Porcupine* contained an article on 31 December 1800 discussing the morality of the attack, so long as it was Frenchmen who had undertaken the project: "We are not prepared to give a *decided* opinion as to the *morality* of killing Bonaparte. That no *foreigner* would be justified in committing such an act we are certain; but whether *Frenchmen* would or not, is with us a matter of doubt."²⁴⁰

Whereas the contemporary article characterized an assassination attempt launched by non-Frenchmen as immoral, some sources do implicate the English government in the attack. The idea that the English funded the conspiracy is entirely feasible. They had, after all, financed numerous previous efforts of Cadoudal against Republican France. Other sources blame the British for concocting the conspiracy itself, not just for financing it. Charles François Marchand de Breuil concluded that it was the English who ordered the attack in the first place, implying that Cadoudal acted only at their behest.²⁴¹ Seconding the involvement of his own government was Samuel Romilly, a well-respected English lawyer and legal reformer. In his memoirs, he recorded that the plot of Christmas Eve 1800 "was suggested and paid for in England."²⁴² He focused his accusations even further, explaining in his journal entry for 27 September 1802 that Secretary Windham "is universally considered as the principal machinator."²⁴³ Without

²⁴⁰ *The Porcupine*, 31 December 1800.

²⁴¹ De Breuil, *Journées mémorables*, 5: 52.

²⁴² Samuel Romilly, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, Written by Himself with A Selection from His Correspondence* (London: John Murray, 1840), 2: 92.

²⁴³ Romilly, *Memoirs*, 2: 92.

question, the English provided the money that Cadoudal used in his conspiratorial plotting. The likelihood that any individual within the English government concocted the idea to blow up Napoleon, however, is slim.²⁴⁴ Henrietta Ponsonby, Countess of Bessborough, recorded an exchange between Napoleon and former Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Charles James Fox, during which the First Consul accused the English of plotting against his life. Fox assured him on his own life that he was mistaken, explaining “Mr. Pitt Windham, like every other Englishman, would shrink with horror from the Idea of secret assassination.”²⁴⁵

Even Cadoudal found the idea of a “secret assassination” improper, though sources most often identify him as the mastermind behind the explosion. He was plotting against the First Consul but did not intend to utilize any means that would cause the death or injury of dozens of innocent bystanders. He considered the excessively violent attack implemented on Christmas Eve 1800 deplorable. When news of the explosion reached him, he was livid. Jean Rohu, a close associate, recorded that the leader “burst into a violent fit of anger and said to us: ‘I could wager that this is some hair-brained doing of that blockhead Saint-Réjant.’”²⁴⁶ Cadoudal’s own plans, derailed by the explosion, had centered on actions “more worthy of a soldier,” which he believed included kidnapping and face-to-face assassination.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Romilly was the only contemporary to name a British official personally responsible for the attack on 3 Nivôse. He did not, however, support his conclusions with any further explanation, rendering them unconvincing.

²⁴⁵ Being horrified by the concept of “secret assassination” does not, of course, mean that the English (government or individual citizens) would not have supported other methods of ridding the world of Bonaparte. Leveson Gower, Lord Granville, *Lord Granville Leveson Gower (First Earl Granville), Private Correspondence: 1781 to 1821*, edited by Castalia Countess Granville (London: John Murray, 1916), 1: 355.

²⁴⁶ Francis Harwell, “George Cadoudal,” in *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Review*, Vol. 45: *January-June 1856*, edited by Sylvanus Urban (London: John Bowyer Nichols and Sons, 1856), 346.

²⁴⁷ Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal*, 279.

Although Cadoudal had sent the group of conspirators to Paris, he had no further responsibility for the assassination attempt. There is no physical evidence linking him to the actual bomb or its design. Under Saint-Réjant's bed at the Leguilloux residence, police officials found a letter written from Gédéon to Soyer, dated 29 December 1800. They claimed the document linked Cadoudal to Saint-Réjant and, therefore, to the infernal machine. Officials knew that Cadoudal often signed his private correspondence, especially when it discussed clandestine activities, as Gédéon. During the trial, Saint-Réjant denied that he was the recipient of the letter. When confronted with the fact that officials had found the letter under his bed at the Leguilloux residence, he answered that it had been "a month since I set foot in that room."²⁴⁸ Because officials could not apprehend Cadoudal, two handwriting experts testified that the *chouan* leader was, in fact, Gédéon, the author of the letter in question. Jean-François Legros and Augustin Oudart mentioned numerous similarities between the letter by Gédéon and a letter known to be from Cadoudal, addressed to General Henri Clarke. In both documents, the writing had "the same feel, the same position of the pen, the same configuration of letters."²⁴⁹ The most compelling evidence, according to the two experts, was the similarity between the upper-case G in Gédéon and Georges.²⁵⁰ There was no doubt that Cadoudal was Gédéon.

Numerous secondary sources have listed the letter from Gédéon to Soyer as proof of Cadoudal's involvement in the attack on the rue Saint Nicaise. The argument is unconvincing, however, as the letter contained no information about any conspiracy. Instead, it assured the recipient of its author's trust and faith: "in you alone is our confidence and all of our hope."²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 79.

²⁴⁹ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 332.

²⁵⁰ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 332, 336.

²⁵¹ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 332.

Had Saint-Réjant received the letter before detonating the bomb, one could argue that he took the message as a sign of Cadoudal's permission to act in whatever manner he saw fit. Because Cadoudal did not write the letter until 29 December, he intended it as nothing more than moral encouragement to stand strong and not to lose faith in the Royalist cause. With no details of any particular conspiracy and no call to action whatsoever, the letter does not implicate Cadoudal in the bomb plot but does prove an ongoing rapport with Saint-Réjant.

More evidence supporting the idea that Cadoudal did not, in fact, devise the infernal machine plot is testimony given by Carbon and Saint-Réjant during their trial. Defendants often do not want to implicate their accomplices, but this reserve did not stop either man from naming his partners during their interrogations. At trial, the prosecutor asked both defendants if Cadoudal was their leader. Carbon responded in the negative, explaining that he had never interacted with the *chouan* leader at all. He had served only under the Count of Puisaye and the Count of Bourmont.²⁵² Because Cadoudal focused his actions in a different region of France, he and Carbon had never met. Although the lack of communication between the two does not exempt Cadoudal as a possible author of the plot, Carbon's insistence that Cadoudal played no part is convincing. Carbon named his fellow conspirators willingly and constantly throughout his interrogations and depositions at trial. He had no reason to exclude Cadoudal while naming others.

Saint-Réjant also denied Cadoudal's involvement, though not as convincingly as Carbon. He declared that he had not corresponded with Cadoudal for nearly a year because the two had argued over the cessation of hostility between the *chouans* and the French republic.²⁵³ Several

²⁵² *Procès Instruit*, 1: 51.

²⁵³ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 72.

pieces of information contradict the conspirator's testimony. As early as August 1800, Fouché had known that Cadoudal planned to send emissaries to Paris.²⁵⁴ The arrival of Saint-Réjant and his associates in November and December of the same year came as no surprise. Even more damaging for the defendant was the letter from Gédéon to Soyer: Cadoudal had written it and Saint-Réjant was clearly its recipient. Correspondence had obviously continued between the two men, despite the defendant's testimony to the contrary.

Given Cadoudal's hostile reaction to news of the explosion and the lack of physical evidence tying him to the bomb, the *chouan* leader was not, in fact, the mastermind behind the violent attack. His only culpability was in sending Saint-Réjant and four others to Paris in late fall 1800 to lay the groundwork for an as-yet-undeveloped conspiracy. Cadoudal had explicitly instructed the group not to take action against Napoleon or his government until his arrival. The leader only authorized them to purchase horses, weapons and various items of clothing after settling in the city. To be clear, Cadoudal certainly was responsible for the plotters' presence in Paris in December 1800, and he was, in fact, developing plans for an attack on the First Consul. He did not, however, intend the conspiracy to take the form utilized on Christmas Eve.

A handful of sources discuss the possibility that Limoelan devised the attack. One such work justifies the opinion by explaining that the conspirator had wanted to design the bomb differently from the final—and unsuccessful—product. He had not wanted to use any tinder or fuse, but instead to set fire directly to the powder, which would have resulted in an almost immediate explosion. Had Limoelan won the argument over design, the bomb would likely have detonated precisely as Napoleon's coach passed. The *chouans* might then have accomplished their fatal mission. The fact that Limoelan advocated a different approach for detonating the

²⁵⁴ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 35.

bomb does not prove that he was the author of the plot as a whole. In fact, one could argue that because the final product did not utilize his approach, he was clearly *not* the head of the conspiracy.

Although the argument receives comparatively little attention in source material, the most likely author of the infernal machine plot was Saint-Réjant. The explosion surprised Cadoudal, who complained that his agent had acted without authorization. Minister Fouché's investigation of the *chouan* conspirators led him to conclude that they had arrived in Paris without a specific plan. He believed that the "thought of a conspiracy against the life of the First Consul and, in particular, to cause his death by an explosion of a barrel of powder, WAS BORN ONLY AFTER THEIR ARRIVAL" in the city.²⁵⁵ The most convincing evidence that Saint-Réjant orchestrated the attack was a second letter found by police under the conspirator's bed at the Leguilloux residence. With no signature and addressed simply to "a friend," it was initially difficult to identify either the author or the intended recipient.²⁵⁶ During his testimony, handwriting expert Oudart explained that someone had forged the letter, hoping to make Limoelan appear to be its author. There were similarities between the anonymous letter and Limoelan's known handwriting, but there was even more evidence to suggest that he was not the author.²⁵⁷ Given the location where officials found the letter and Oudart's testimony about its author, one can deduce that Saint-Réjant wrote the document. Expert witness Legros argued against this conclusion. He testified that Saint-Réjant "is not the author of the context of the anonymous

²⁵⁵ Original author's emphasis. Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal*, 286.

²⁵⁶ *Procès Instruit*, 1: xlvii.

²⁵⁷ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 331.

missive.”²⁵⁸ He did not, however, offer any suggestion about who he thought had written the document.

The content of the letter, especially when coupled with its discovery under the conspirator’s bed, is evidence enough that Saint-Réjant was its author. He used vague terminology when discussing the identity of the actors but included specific details that only someone personally and directly involved in the plot could have known at the time.²⁵⁹ He explained to his anonymous friend the miscommunication among the conspirators: “a person had promised to warn the wrongdoer of the moment of the departure of the First Consul; the person did not do it.”²⁶⁰ Another detail, known only by someone present at the time of the detonation, was the fact that a grenadier had pushed the cart, dislodging its content. These two circumstances contributed to the bomb’s failure, but neither was the ultimate cause, according to the letter’s author. He concluded the letter by explaining that the lack of success was “the fault of the powder, and not of the wrongdoer.”²⁶¹

Saint-Réjant is the only possible author of the letter for a variety of reasons. The letter was not a simple account of events but included specific and minute details. A person outside of the conspiracy’s core group could not have known that one cohort planned to signal another. Another detail known only to someone present on the rue Saint-Nicaise shortly before the detonation was that Durand had moved the cart out of the way. On the day of the attack, Limoelan and Carbon had taken positions close to the Tuileries palace that allowed them to

²⁵⁸ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 335.

²⁵⁹ Information concerning the plot eventually became public, of course, but by the point when officials found the letter at the Leguilloux residence, only those involved in the plot would have known its minute details.

²⁶⁰ *Procès Instruit*, 1: xlvii.

²⁶¹ *Procès Instruit*, 1: xlvii.

signal Saint-Réjant of the First Consul's departure. They were not, therefore, present to witness Durand's actions. The conclusion of the anonymous letter also eliminates Limoelan and Carbon as possible authors. Maintaining his personal innocence in the plot's failure, the author would not have confessed to neglecting to signal the First Consul's departure. These details leave Saint-Réjant as the only possible author of the letter.

Although only Saint-Réjant, Carbon, and Limoelan played active roles in the events on the rue Saint Nicaise, twenty additional people faced charges alongside them. Limoelan and six other suspects managed to evade police and to avoid going to trial.²⁶² With financial backing from his fiancée, Limoelan escaped to the United States via England.²⁶³ The defendants included several people, such as the Leguilloux couple, who had housed the conspirators. The most surprising individual charged with participating in the plot was Carbon's young niece, Madeleine, who was only seventeen at the time of the trial. Police understood that the citizens who provided shelter to the known *chouans* had not played roles in the conspiracy itself, but each of the defendants faced the same charges nonetheless. The indictment read that they "were charged with forming, with collaborating in, a plot aiming for the murder of the First Consul of the Republic; with troubling the Republic through a civil war by arming citizens one against

²⁶² Bourgeois, Saint-Victor, Layhaye and Joyau escaped from Paris and sought refuge in England or in the Vendée or *chouan* territory. Sources provide no information about how Ambroise-Marie Songé and Geneviève Berthonet avoided the trial.

²⁶³ Limoelan led a successful and comfortable life after his escape to the United States. He attended seminary in Baltimore in 1808, becoming an ordained priest in August 1812. He served as vicar in Charleston, South Carolina before transferring to Georgetown. Upon learning of the Bourbon restoration in 1815, he celebrated a *Te Deum* at his church. He died of natural causes on 29 September 1826. Some sources have claimed that he chose to dedicate himself to religion because of the guilt he felt over the violent death of Marianne Peusol, whom Saint-Réjant employed to watch the cart on 3 Nivôse. It seems more likely that his long-standing faith, his uncle's career as a priest, and his fiancée's decision to join the Church herself served as his motivation. François René de Chateaubriand, *Oeuvres Complètes de Chateaubriand: Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, edited by Edmond Biré (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1904), 110n1.

another, and against the exercise of legitimate authority; of having, to serve the execution of the plot, amassed weapons and munitions; with having prepared and placed an infernal machine; with having carried out an attack designed to kill the First Consul by lighting the aforesaid infernal machine; with having done so premeditatedly; and with having, by the effect of the explosion, caused the death of several people.”²⁶⁴

Throughout the trial, the defendants who rented rooms to Carbon or Saint-Réjant recounted everything they knew about the two men and their conspiracy. Marie-Antoinette Jourdan testified that Limoelan, Saint-Hilaire and Doctor Collin visited Saint-Réjant at her mother’s house the day after the explosion. She described a discussion she overheard during which Saint-Réjant declared, “the First Consul escaped it twice, but he will not escape it a third.”²⁶⁵ She explained to the jury that she had delivered letters and packages to Saint-Réjant at the Leguilloux residence after he had moved from her mother’s home. The prosecutor asked the Leguilloux couple to explain why they had allowed Saint-Réjant, who lacked the appropriate paperwork to reside in Paris, to live in their home. The couple’s attorney explained that the tenant had provided legal paperwork, but under the name Soyer.²⁶⁶ They had no reason to suspect that it was not his legal name. When asked about the living arrangements within their home, Louise Mainguet Leguilloux admitted that she had sent one of their daughters to a friend’s house to give Saint-Réjant a bed for himself. The prosecutor reproached her for having done so, finding it ridiculous that a mother would send her child away in order to make space for a total stranger. She agreed, but justified the odd actions because of the money it brought to the family:

²⁶⁴ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 28.

²⁶⁵ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 210.

²⁶⁶ *Procès Instruit*, 2: 329.

“I experienced a lot of hardships; it was in order to have a little something, to help a bit with rent.”²⁶⁷

Doctor Collin was as cooperative as possible during his interrogations and testimonies. He admitted to knowing two of his co-defendants, in addition to Saint-Réjant. Bourgeois had sought his help for a fever nearly three and a half years earlier.²⁶⁸ Saint-Hilaire had been born near the property of Doctor Collin’s father. To explain his relationship to Saint-Réjant, the doctor advised the jury that he had treated him prior to Christmas Eve 1800 for a pulmonary catarrh. He saw his co-defendant only for professional reasons and only for a handful of minutes on any given visit. On the evening of Christmas Eve, his patient summoned him again to his room at the Leguilloux residence. When he arrived, Saint-Réjant’s condition was terrible: he was bleeding, breathing with difficulty, and complained of sore eyes and deafness in one ear. He claimed his injuries resulted from a fall. The doctor treated him and promised to come back soon to check on him.²⁶⁹ During the trial, the prosecutor brought to light for the jury Article 12 of a regulation dated 8 November 1780. The legislation required “master surgeons, and all others practicing surgery in Paris; to write the names, family names, quarters and homes of the people who are injured, night or day, and who have been taken into their homes in order to be treated or who have been treated elsewhere, and to inform the commissioner of the quarter of the quality and circumstances of their injuries, under pain of a 300 franc fine, a loss of the right to practice, and even corporal punishment.”²⁷⁰ Doctor Collin did not report Saint-Réjant’s information after

²⁶⁷ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 103.

²⁶⁸ The sources do not provide any additional names for Bourgeois.

²⁶⁹ Marie-Antoinette Jourdan testified that Doctor Collin visited Saint-Réjant at her mother’s house on the day after the explosion. The doctor argued that he did not call on Saint-Réjant again until 5 Nivôse.

²⁷⁰ *Procès Instruit*, 2: 333.

diagnosing the pulmonary catarrh because it was not the result of an injury. He also neglected, however, to report his patient's condition once examining him on either occasion after the detonation on the rue Saint Nicaise. Even if one accepts Saint-Réjant's explanation to the doctor that the injuries resulted from a fall, the situation still required him to report the patient's information to the local commissioner.

The defendants who had housed or cared for the conspirators provided convincing information and seemed genuinely innocent of any actual treason. Carbon and Saint-Réjant were not so persuasive in arguing their innocence. During his interrogations at the Ministry of Police and his testimony during the trial, Carbon admitted to making purchases for Saint-Réjant and Limoelan and to interacting with them on a regular basis. Despite this involvement, he continually proclaimed his innocence, explaining that he was unaware of his two associates' intentions.²⁷¹ To support his claim, he explained that Limoelan had promised him the cart and horse after he had finished with them. When asked why he had left his sister's house to seek shelter elsewhere, Carbon replied that Limoelan had told him the location was no longer safe. "The affair may fall on the royalists," his friend told him, "and people might bother us."²⁷² The prosecutor then questioned why, because Limoelan had told him he was not safe because a conspiracy might fall on them, did he not suspect his friend's involvement in the crime. Carbon replied simply that it did not occur to him. He did not think of his friend's involvement—or his own—until the police arrived to arrest him.

Carbon's argument of unwitting complicity is entirely unconvincing. Given the number of people who testified to hearing him speak with his accomplices, it is unlikely that he was not

²⁷¹ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 21.

²⁷² *Procès Instruit*, 1: 65.

privity to the plot's details. Likewise, he frequently used the aliases *le Petit François* or Constant. Innocent actions do not necessitate aliases. The form in which he gave his responses during the trial also reinforced his guilt. One might expect conflicts between the initial interrogation and information provided later during the trial, but these issues were not the only ones present. Carbon frequently contradicted himself from one minute to the next.

Saint-Réjant presented his case in a more orderly fashion than his co-defendant had done. He offered explanations for any details that he did not outright deny. When asked whether Cadoudal had arranged for him to come to Paris, he answered negatively. He had come on his own volition, seeking medical care for an illness.²⁷³ He admitted to having met with Carbon and Limoelan at various points during his stay in the city but denied seeing them on Christmas Eve 1800. The prosecutor questioned why Saint-Victor informed him of Carbon's arrest if he had no role in the conspiracy. Saint-Réjant replied, "I do not know his motives for doing so."²⁷⁴ The official then wanted to know why the defendant had left the widow Jourdan's home upon learning of his associate's arrest. At this point, Saint-Réjant admitted to an illegal act, but not anything concerning the conspiracy. His paperwork for residing in Paris was not in order, he confessed, and he feared that the police would arrest him.

More calmly and rationally presented, Saint-Réjant's testimony was unconvincing nevertheless. None of his explanations surmounted the physical evidence and depositions against him. Marie-Antoinette Jourdan's testimony that she delivered correspondence for him to the Leguilloux residence weakens his claim that the letters found there by police did not belong to him. The specific details concerning the plot's failure in the anonymous letter illustrate not

²⁷³ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 71-72.

²⁷⁴ *Procès Instruit*, 1: 74.

only his guilt in the plot but also identify him as the letter's author. His lack of proper paperwork allowing him to reside within Paris implies unlawful intentions. If he had accepted his illegal status in the city but wanted to stay there anyway, he would have kept as low a profile as possible, avoiding other known *chouans* and Royalists.

When the trial concluded, the defendants found themselves divided into four groups, depending on the punishment doled out to them. The jury acquitted eight, including Carbon's teenage nieces.²⁷⁵ Five defendants received sentences of three months in prison for housing people who did not possess proper paperwork to reside in Paris. This group included Carbon's sister and the Leguilloux couple.²⁷⁶ The court sentenced Doctor Collin to three months in prison and a 300-franc fine for his failure to report Saint-Réjant's injuries as required. As the only two at trial who actively participated in the plot, Carbon and Saint-Réjant both received the death penalty. Upon hearing the verdict and sentence, Saint-Réjant implored, "I ask to be executed within twenty-four hours."²⁷⁷ He did not receive his final wish. The trial ended on 6 April 1801, but the two conspirators were not executed until 20 April 1801.

The infernal machine plot destroyed Napoleon's confidence in his understanding of the political situation he had inherited on 18 Brumaire. The conspiracy launched by Céracchi and his associates in October 1800 had not surprised the First Consul. He had expected violent opposition from the Jacobins, who felt that the events of 18 Brumaire established an illegal government. The Jacobins feared Napoleon from the first days of his regime. Many believed he

²⁷⁵ Other acquittals: Adélaïde-Marie Champion de Cicé, Angélique-Marie-Françoise Gouyon, Reine-Marie-Aubine Gouyon, Jean Baudet, Mathurin-Jules Micault-Lavieuville, and Louise-Catherine Cudel-Villeneuve (femme Lavieuville).

²⁷⁶ The two others were Aubine-Louise Gouyon (widow Gouyon-Beaufort) and Marie-Anne Duquesne.

²⁷⁷ *Procès Instruit*, 2: 339.

wanted to consolidate power for himself or, perhaps worse yet, to set the groundwork for a Bourbon restoration. The First Consul had also expected resistance from the Royalists but did not believe it would take a violent form.

Napoleon's initial belief that the Jacobins were responsible for the detonation on the rue Saint Nicaise prompted a swift and harsh response from the government. The new law allowing the government to deport the government's enemies without trial was one such response, which resulted in the banishment of 130 innocent Republicans. Another rash decision by the First Consul may have occasioned the execution of four men. Céracchi, Joseph Aréna, Dominique Demerville, and François Jean-Baptiste Topino-Lebrun had spent approximately two months in prison before the explosion on Christmas Eve 1800. Some historians argue that the government delayed their trial because the evidence presented against them was insufficient to warrant a guilty verdict.²⁷⁸ The delay between the arrest and the prosecution of the four conspirators was uncharacteristic, but it was not due to a lack of evidence. The testimony of Jacques Harel, who had infiltrated the group, sufficed to prove that a conspiracy was underway. Whether the group would have taken action without the encouragement and funding from Harel was open to debate, but it is clear that the members had discussed a plan of action against the First Consul. Even before the attack on 3 Nivôse, the justice system prescribed the death penalty for conspiratorial actions or intentions. When the four men faced the firing squad on 31 January 1801, the punishment was just, regardless of the actions taken by Saint-Réjant and Carbon.

A more reasoned reaction to the two recent conspiracies launched against him was Napoleon's support and acceptance of a law on 7 February 1801 that changed the organization of

²⁷⁸ Jean-François Eugène Robinet, *Le Procès des Dantonistes d'après les documents précédé d'une introduction historique recherchés pour servir à l'histoire de la Révolution Française* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1879), 12.

the criminal system. The new regulation established special criminal courts in thirty-two of the nation's departments. The members of these tribunals consisted of two judges from the regular court system, three military judges and two more civilian officials. Napoleon himself held the power to appoint these men. The law granted the authority "to pronounce final judgment without appeal, on vagrants and habitual criminals, *ratione personae* [by reason of his person], and on a great number of crimes pertaining to brigandage: burglary, highway robbery, murder, arson, counterfeiting, seditious assembly and illegal possession of weapons."²⁷⁹ Napoleon's detractors viewed the special criminal courts as offensive and even tyrannical because they allowed the First Consul to impinge upon the judicial system, which was previously supposed to remain separate from the executive branch.

Now aware that the Republicans were not his only opponents, Napoleon sought to undermine the Royalists' influence in France. The *chouan* threat had dwindled continually over the years of the Revolution. Greater acceptance among Frenchmen of the Catholic Church and of religion in general prompted many fighters to return to their homes, even though the goal of restoring the Bourbons to power remained unattained. The republic's repeated ability to defeat the *chouans* on the battlefield demoralized them. Many of their leaders had already signed peace treaties with the government, accepting wealth in exchange for their loyalty—or at least their silence. One of the strongest motivations for the *chouan* fighters to pick up their weapons in the first place had been the persecution of the Catholic Church during the Revolution. Recognizing that he could win the support of these people and deal a devastating blow to the Royalists as a whole, Napoleon sought peace with the papacy in Rome in 1801. By reestablishing the legal

²⁷⁹ Georges Lefebvre, *Napoléon* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1935), translated by Henry F. Stochold as *Napoleon* (New York: Routledge Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1969), 1: 112-113.

status of the Catholic Church in France, the First Consul removed the Royalists' most powerful ally, the pope.

The Royalists continued to plot against Napoleon and would, in fact, launch another attack in 1804. At this point, Cadoudal reappeared on the scene but played a more active role in the conspiracy. Given the failure of a purely Republican plot in October 1800—that of Céracchi and his accomplices—and of a Royalist one on Christmas Eve 1800, the *chouan* leader and his colleagues sought to combine both groups. Their efforts would fail yet again but would continue to prompt reactions from Napoleon that pushed him closer and closer to consolidating power for himself alone.

CHAPTER FIVE CADOUDAL, PICHEGRU, AND MOREAU

Although the hotheaded actions of Pierre Robinault, known as Saint-Réjant shattered his hopes of overthrowing the Consular government in December 1800, Georges Cadoudal did not lose sight of his goal. His discussions of ridding France of Napoleon continued to focus on violence. Royalists in England with whom he conversed believed that since “he talks only of combat and uprisings; he is a man who is impossible to make listen to reason.”²⁸⁰ He worked hard to overcome the impression born from Saint-Réjant’s infernal machine that the *chouans* were too impetuous to be useful to the Royalist cause. He believed violence would prove necessary, but not the kind of viciousness his former agent had employed. Over the three years following the explosion on the rue Saint-Nicaise, Cadoudal fought an uphill battle to convince the French princes that he was the right person to command the Bourbon restoration. Eventually, they consented to allow him to take action again on their behalf. They insisted, however, that he employ more levelheaded partners than he had in the past, wanting him to rely on men they knew and respected. Disappointed that he was not in full control of the situation but willing to push forward in order to destroy Republicanism in France, Cadoudal bided his time while the princes secured additional support for the cause.

Jean-Charles Pichegru, the son of a farmer, had latched onto Republican ideals from their earliest inception. When the colonists in America began their fight for independence from England, he took up arms and traveled to North America to join their cause. When the opportunity to institute similar political reform in his own nation presented itself in 1789, he continued the fight. By 1791, he was the leader of the Jacobin Club of Besançon and two years

²⁸⁰ Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal et la Chouannerie* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et Cie, 1887), 236-237.

later earned a promotion to general and received command of the Army of the Rhine. His numerous and impressive accomplishments on the battlefield and his devotion to the Republican cause made him one of the most respected and popular generals of the French Republic.

In April 1795, the National Convention in Paris bestowed upon him command of the Army of the Rhine-et-Moselle. The post was an important one, but he was not enthusiastic about it. He had hoped for a break in the fighting that would allow him to enjoy the popularity and fortune he had accumulated during his last campaign. When Pichegru arrived at his new headquarters in Altkirch, the situation he found did nothing to improve his mood. His troops were “discouraged, demoralized by their suffering.”²⁸¹ They lacked basic supplies such as proper clothing. They did not have sufficient artillery to fortify their position adequately, and their numbers were insufficient to enact the orders they received from Paris—when the government deigned to send them directives at all. Pichegru had arrived on the front without orders of attack and without even a plan for maintaining the current position. After more than two months, he finally received instructions from Paris. Dejected and disgusted, he took no action and finally responded to the National Convention a month later. He explained that he did not have sufficient troops to carry out the proposed attack, noting that he had not even horses with which to reposition the artillery. He presented a counterplan, but the government rejected it. The resulting stagnation crushed morale even more and increased Pichegru’s aggravation with both the military and political situation in France.

After several months wallowing alongside the troops of the Army of the Rhine-et-Moselle, Pichegru had made it known to some Swiss border guards that he resented his post and

²⁸¹ Gustaaf Caudrillier, *La Trahison de Pichegru et les intrigues royalistes dans l’est avant fructidor* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1908), 5.

had also lost faith in France's ability to sustain a Republican regime. The "perpetual variations in popular government" resulted in an ineffective and unstable regime.²⁸² The country's best hope for reestablishing stability, he admitted, was through the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy. One of the confidants relayed Pichegru's sentiments to the British ambassador in Switzerland, William Wickham. By fall 1795, the general was participating in open talks with agents of the exiled royals. He informed them of troop movements and of the numbers of soldiers stationed at various points along the Rhine. "Pichegru has left only 4,000 now in all of F[ranche] Comté. He could not with decency leave less," Wickham related to British authorities.²⁸³ With such an illustrious and capable French general in his pocket, Louis Joseph de Bourbon, the Prince of Condé, began considering a restoration of his family's monarchy through a plan with Pichegru at its heart.²⁸⁴

Condé had one of his agents, Louis Fauche-Borel, deliver a letter to Pichegru investigating the possibility of his leading the effort to restore the royal family to power. The prince proposed a two-fold and simple strategy. To start, he wanted Pichegru simply to proclaim his personal loyalty to the king and to display the white flag of the Bourbon family among his troops. Next, he wanted the general to deliver into his hands the town of Huningue, from which further military operations could launch. In return for his loyal service, Pichegru stood to collect a plethora of rewards. The royal family planned to rename Pichegru's hometown after him and to exempt its citizens from paying taxes for fifteen years. Likewise, any city that opened its

²⁸² Caudrillier, *La Trahison*, 5.

²⁸³ William Wickham, ed., *The Correspondence of the Right Honourable William Wickham from the Year 1794* (London: Richard Bentley, 1870), 1: 207-208.

²⁸⁴ The Prince of Condé was a member of a junior branch of the ruling family. He led a large *émigré* army and worked often with the Austrians until a dispute over how best to proceed against Revolutionary France prompted him to form a partnership with the English.

doors to the Royalist forces would also be exempt from taxes and its citizens would receive full and unreserved amnesty for any actions they might have taken during the Revolution to date. The king would confirm in his rank any soldier under Pichegru's command and would promote without question anyone the general recommended. As for Pichegru's personal rewards, the Bourbons intended to name him a marshal of France, as well as the governor of Alsace. He would gain admission to the ranks of the Order of Saint-Louis. He would also receive "the château of Chambord and its lands, and twelve pieces of cannon taken from the Austrians; one million cash, an annual salary of 200,000 livres, a home in Paris."²⁸⁵ Upon Pichegru's death, his wife would continue receiving half his annual salary, with each of his children receiving 50,000 livres "in perpetuity, until the extinction of his line."²⁸⁶

Despite the impressive rewards Condé offered him, Pichegru found his proposal simplistic to the point of incompleteness. He mentioned in his response to the prince the efforts in 1793 of Charles-François du Périer Dumouriez, who had failed to overthrow the Republican regime in Paris partly because of his hastily conceived and uncertain tactics.²⁸⁷ Pichegru proposed another course of action. He offered to join with nearby Austrian troops and to march

²⁸⁵ *Moniteur*, 23 Fructidor V, 9 September 1797.

²⁸⁶ *Moniteur*, 23 Fructidor V, 9 September 1797.

²⁸⁷ Dumouriez had initially supported the Revolution and wanted to spread its ideals to other European countries, specifically to Belgium. His vote *against* the execution of Louis XVI promoted suspicions of royalist leanings among other politicians. His winning record on the battlefield prevented the government from taking any action against him. Soundly defeated at Neerwinden in March 1793, however, he found himself and his actions hotly debated by the National Convention. When officials arrived to investigate his conduct, Dumouriez captured them and turned them over to the Austrians. He then tried to convince his troops to march on Paris to overthrow the government. His soldiers refused, prompting him to surrender to the Austrians in April. Republicans and royalists alike mistrusted him because of his apparent lack of genuine political ideology.

as a combined force to Paris itself. Wanting “to have for himself alone the glory of making the counterrevolution,” the Prince de Condé utterly rejected the general’s proposal.²⁸⁸

Having reached an impasse with the Royalists, Pichegru found nothing but aggravation in all political realms. In November 1795, a new constitution replaced the National Convention with the Directory in Paris. The continuance in power of two-thirds of the deputies that Pichegru and others viewed as corrupt further weakened the general’s faith in Republican forms of government.²⁸⁹ By 10 January 1796, “the deplorable state of his army, the demands of a greedy mistress and the pleasures of high living for himself” prompted Pichegru to cut ties with the French military.²⁹⁰ After tendering his resignation seven times, the general finally saw his offer accepted. Director Lazare Nicolas Marguerite Carnot reported that he accepted Pichegru’s departure because his “conduct gave birth to doubts in my mind, relative to the firmness of his principles.”²⁹¹

His sudden unemployment concerned the Royalists. They questioned what use he could be to them if he no longer commanded any troops. Fauche-Borel met with the former general to discuss the concerns. Pichegru assured him that everything was under control. He advised the

²⁸⁸ *Correspondance trouvée le 2 floréal an 5 à Offembourg, dans les fourgons du Général Klinglin, Général-Major de l’armée autrichienne, et chargé de la correspondance secrète de cette armée* (Paris: Imprimerie de la République, Puviôse VI), 1: 15.

²⁸⁹ The new constitution required that two-thirds of the deputies from the National Convention continue serving in the new Directory.

²⁹⁰ D. M. G. Sutherland, *The French Revolution and Empire: The Quest for a Civic Order* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2003), 282.

²⁹¹ Lazare Carnot, *Reply of L. N. M. Carnot, Citizen of France, One of the Founders of the Republic, and Constitutional Member of the Executive Directory: to the Report Made on the Conspiracy of the 18th Fructidor, 5th Year, by J. Ch. Bailleul, in the Name of the Select Committee*, 3rd edition (London: J. Wright, 1799), 19-20.

agent to trust him and his decisions, explaining “that he was resolved to support the Royal against the Republican cause—but that the manner of doing it must be left to himself.”²⁹²

Pichegru took no action until May 1797, when dozens of openly-monarchist candidates, including himself, earned seats in the Directory’s Council of 500. The election of so many Royalist supporters caused panic among its Republican representatives. In early September, an anonymous notice greeted the government’s assemblies and enflamed the already tense situation. It claimed that those most recently elected “were nothing more than brazen royalists, *chouan* leaders, *émigrés*, assassins, conspirators.”²⁹³ Hostile debates erupted as deputies denounced each other as enemies of the state. On the night of 3 September, by order of the government, soldiers arrested numerous supposed schemers.²⁹⁴ The following morning, Parisians learned of the existence—and routing—of a Royalist plot to destroy the republic. The announcement attributed the safety of the nation and the thwarting of the conspirators to “the vigilance of the government, and the heads of the armed forces, [who] nullified their criminal efforts.”²⁹⁵

On the same day, the Directory sentenced 65 men to deportation based on nothing more than allegations of conspiracy and with no proof of any particular person’s involvement in such actions.²⁹⁶ Among them was Pichegru, whom the government named as the mastermind behind the Royalist plot to overthrow the Directory. Over the next week, the remaining deputies learned of several packets of documents proving Pichegru’s frequent contact with the Bourbon princes. Napoleon Bonaparte had obtained in Venice some papers of Louis-Alexandre de Launay, Count

²⁹² Wickham, *Correspondence*, 1: 251.

²⁹³ *Moniteur*, 19 Fructidor V, 5 September 1797.

²⁹⁴ The *Moniteur* lists twenty men by name, but concludes “one does not know exactly the number” of those arrested. 19 Fructidor V, 5 September 1797.

²⁹⁵ *Moniteur*, 19 Fructidor V, 5 September 1797.

²⁹⁶ *Moniteur*, 24 Fructidor V, 10 September 1797.

of Antraigues, for example, which contained accounts of the conversations Pichegru had had with various Royalists. The papers included Antraigues' rehashing of a conversation he had with fellow secret agent Jean Gabriel Maurice Rocques, Count of Montgaillard, about Condé's plan for Pichegru and the rewards he might receive for his services. Additional condemnation came in the form of a letter written by General Jean-Victor Marie Moreau to Director François-Marie Barthélemy. Like Bonaparte, he had discovered private correspondence that proved Pichegru's involvement with the Royalists. Moreau explained that the former deputy "was prudent enough not to have written anything," but that the documents he seized from Austrian General Johann Freiherr Klinglin frequently mentioned him and his treasonous dealings.²⁹⁷

On 22 September, Pichegru and other condemned deputies boarded a vessel bound for Cayenne in French Guiana. Upon their arrival, the prison-ship captain exaggerated their crimes to the governor, describing the group as "villains . . . [who] had already lighted up a civil war in France, where they massacred the republicans with impunity."²⁹⁸ The governor sent them to lodgings infested with insects and snakes, many of which were poisonous. Several of the men fell victim to disease, which their dirty living conditions, lack of nutritious food, and unbearable heat rendered fatal. The survivors, including Pichegru, took advantage of an opportunity to escape in June 1798 and arrived in England three months later.

Safely installed in London, Pichegru met frequently with Cadoudal and other Bourbon supporters to devise a new plan of action against the regime in France—now the Consular

²⁹⁷ *Moniteur*, 30 Fructidor V, 16 September 1797.

²⁹⁸ Jean-Pierre Ramel, *Narrative of the Deportation to Cayenne of Barthélemy, Pichegru, Willot, Marbois, La Rue, Ramel &c. &c. in Consequence of the Revolution of the 18th Fructidor (September 4, 1797), Containing a Variety of Important Facts Relative to that Revolution, and to the Voyage, Residence and Escape of Barthélemy, Pichegru, &c. &c.* (London: J. Wright, 1799), 96.

government. Cadoudal had opposed Saint-Réjant's explosive assault against Napoleon on 24 December 1800, finding the approach unbecoming of the Royalist cause. He insisted that the most appropriate project involved a face-to-face ambush against the First Consul in Paris. Attacking him elsewhere would be fruitless because the Royalists would then have to fight their way to the capital. If they could defeat the First Consul within the city itself, their subsequent actions would be much easier to accomplish. Cadoudal and Pichegru devised a plan in which the *chouan* leader would lead 100 men in an ambush of Napoleon and his guards as they traveled between Malmaison and Paris. Such an approach, Cadoudal believed, "would not be considered assassination, but a battle," where fate would decide what kind of government France deserved.²⁹⁹ Once the Royalists emerged victorious, Pichegru would receive temporary political power while Louis, Count of Provence, the brother of Louis XVI and current heir to the throne, made his way to the capital. Cadoudal would continue to lead his band of fighters. The Bourbons behind the plot wanted a third participant to convince the military to fight for their cause. They needed someone whose name and reputation could compete with those of Napoleon.

Jean-Victor-Marie Moreau enjoyed a level of "celebrity which few officers, even in advanced life, have the good fortune to attain."³⁰⁰ He had experienced, like many military and political officials, some stumbling blocks during his career, but he had always managed to overcome them. Several of his personal connections had caused suspicions of his loyalty to the

²⁹⁹ John Stevens Cabot Abbott, *The History of Napoleon Bonaparte* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1855), 2: 420.

³⁰⁰ Jean-Victor Marie Moreau, *Memoirs &c. &c. of General Moreau; Illustrated with a Portrait, a Facsimile of the General's Last Letter to Madame Moreau, and a Beautifully Engraved Plan of the Siege of Kehl, and Passage of the Rhine in 1796*, edited and translated by John Philippart (London: A. J. Valpy, 1814), 22.

Republic. He had, after all, served under both Dumouriez and Pichegru, two known traitors. The delay of nearly five months between his finding physical evidence of Pichegru's duplicity in April 1797 and his relating it to the Directory in September had so taxed the government's belief in his devotion that he was asked to resign his command. He had done so, but rejoined the military the following September. He served loyally even as he was growing disillusioned with the Directory's leadership.

In summer 1799, abbé Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, the most prominent executive member of the Directory, sought an audience with Moreau. The Director worried over the political situation in France, explaining that he feared the Revolution was lost "if a more energetic government was not devised."³⁰¹ When Moreau agreed, Sieyès informed him of his plans for constructing a new Republican regime, the Consulate. However intrigued by the possibility, Moreau would not commit to participating in the plot. Ultimately, he concluded that it was not his station in life to play a political role in his nation's history, that his place was among the soldiers. Sieyès had another candidate in mind, and when Napoleon returned from the Egyptian campaign in October 1799, he approached him about spearheading the creation of the Consular regime. Hungry for power and prestige—more so than Sieyès had expected or desired—Bonaparte agreed, forever surpassing Moreau in the annals of French history.

Moreau almost immediately regretted his decision not to act alongside Sieyès. He had always envied Napoleon's reputation, and the recent addition of political champion to his rival's repertoire did nothing to soothe his jealousy. Moreau believed the First Consul lacked the character to lead the nation down its proper political path. He considered himself "the

³⁰¹ John Davis, trans., *The Life and Campaigns of Victor Moreau Comprehending His Trial, Justification and Other Events, Till the Period of His Embarkation for the United States* (New York: Southwick and Hardcastle, 1806), 220.

accomplished general, the modest and virtuous citizen, whereas Bonaparte was the impulsive and lucky usurper without aptitude.”³⁰²

Lucky may be an appropriate characterization of Napoleon in general terms, but not when it originates from Moreau. Napoleon was lucky that Sieyès considered him for the plot of 18 Brumaire, but the opportunity presented itself to him only *after* Moreau declined it. To suggest that luck was on the First Consul’s side on the battlefield implies that he was the only Revolutionary general to accomplish impressive victories. It also does not take into consideration his attempt at increasing the already formidable military reputation of Moreau. He offered the general a daring plan of action in summer 1800, the success of which would surely boost the reputation of its commander. Again, Moreau chose not to take advantage of an opportunity presented to him. According to one of his friends, his was a “slow and cautious genius” that prevented him from undertaking bold actions upon which the First Consul thrived.³⁰³ As such, his reputation was respected but lacked the flair of Napoleon’s. Arguably, Moreau’s victory at the Battle of Hohenlinden in December 1800 was just as responsible, if not more so, than the First Consul’s victory at Marengo in June for ending the War of the Second Coalition. That historical sources discuss Marengo more than Hohenlinden is not a sign of Napoleon’s luck but of his manipulation of the press. Had he chosen to accept a more active role on 18 Brumaire, Moreau would have become master of the press himself, allowing him to record events as he saw fit. Napoleon was not lucky, at least when compared to Moreau. He simply possessed “an unrivaled genius for seeing opportunities where others did not and for seizing them unhesitatingly, boldly, calculating the risks and taking them.”³⁰⁴

³⁰² Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal*, 293.

³⁰³ Abbott, *History of Napoleon*, 2: 311.

³⁰⁴ J. Christopher Herold, *The Age of Napoleon* (New York: American Heritage Inc., 1991), 40.

After his victory at Hohenlinden in December 1800, Moreau retired from military service and settled into civilian life with his new wife, a woman afflicted by even more jealousy than her husband. Whereas Moreau envied Napoleon because of the opportunities for greatness that he missed, Madame Moreau envied the First Consul's wife, Josephine. Her family, the Hullots, were affluent, but had, over recent years lost the majority of its wealth "on account of the difficulties attending a process at law."³⁰⁵ She resented not having comparable money and prestige, which she felt her family deserved every bit as much as the Bonapartes. Although he recognized jealousy in both people, Napoleon concluded it was Madame Moreau's that resulted in her husband's downfall: "If he had made a different marriage, he would have been marshal, duke, would have made campaigns with the Grande Armée, would have acquired a new glory."³⁰⁶

The Moreau residence became a hotbed of anti-Bonapartism. Citizens who mourned the centralized nature of the Consular government and who worried over Napoleon's ambition visited frequently. The disgruntled couple also called upon the homes of other disillusioned subjects. In each residence, discussions often took place about the possibility of overthrowing the government, though they included no specific details such as participants or plans of action. During one such conversation, a friend suggested to Moreau that he should spearhead a movement against the government and that, because of his reputation throughout France, he would likely succeed. While he agreed that Napoleon was harmful to the nation, Moreau declined to take action against him: "He said that he felt the danger to liberty, but dreaded civil war; that he was ready if wanted—his friends would always find him ready; they might act, he

³⁰⁵ Moreau, *Memoirs*, 241.

³⁰⁶ Napoleon Bonaparte, *Correspondance de Napoléon I^{er}*, publié par ordre de l'Empereur Napoléon III (Paris: Henri Plon, 1870), 30: 501.

would not stand back, but he thought this was premature; he even could not agree that he was so important a man.”³⁰⁷ Yet again, Moreau found himself with the opportunity to enhance his prestige and to take the reins of France’s political future. And yet again, he proved unwilling to accept the risks that inevitably accompany any chance at greatness.

Whereas the opportunity presented to Moreau in the conversation at his friend’s home was hypothetical, the one Pichegru and Cadoudal were busy concocting was not. Aware of Moreau’s disillusionment with the Consular regime and with Napoleon personally, Pichegru decided to explore the possibility of his participating in a plot to overthrow the government. In late June 1803, he sent Frédéric Lajolais to inquire about it.³⁰⁸ Moreau initially declined to converse with the man, whom he had implicated, along with Pichegru, in treasonous activities in September 1797. He had singled the officer out by name in his denunciation to Director Barthélemy: “I suspect that the Lajolais family is part of this intrigue.”³⁰⁹ Only after the agent arrived with a letter from Pichegru himself did any discussion begin in earnest. Moreau spoke cautiously to his guest but also “with tenderness [toward] General Pichegru, whose great talents and energetic virtues he admired, and whose lamentable end he incessantly deplored.”³¹⁰ Excited by the positive tone toward Pichegru, Lajolais reported to him that Moreau “was very

³⁰⁷ Mary Clarke Mohl, *Madame Récamier: With a Sketch of the History of Society in France* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1862), 27.

³⁰⁸ Several sources claim that Lajolais was a spy of the French police. One such source is that of Louis Fauche-Borel, the agent of Louis, Prince of Condé, who had participated in the earliest attempts to get Pichegru to support a royalist plot to overthrow France’s republican government. He described Lajolais as “a special breed of conspirator, because he wanted to serve everyone.” Louis Fauche-Borel, *Notices sur les généraux Pichegru et Moreau* (London: Imprimerie de T. Harper, 1807), 81.

³⁰⁹ *Moniteur*, 30 Fructidor, 16 September 1797.

³¹⁰ Paul Svinine, *Some Details Concerning General Moreau and His Last Moments, Followed by a Short Biographical Memoir* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1814), 22-23.

resolved in his favor, for his particular interests.”³¹¹ Over the previous years, he had grown “discontent with the government of the First Consul, [and] desired and wanted, with all his power, to overthrow it.”³¹² Upon learning of Moreau’s willingness to participate in the plot, the Count of Artois, brother of the heir to the French throne, believed Royalist success was a foregone conclusion.

Not everything went as planned. Cadoudal’s efforts to gather the hundred-man force that would attack Napoleon as he traveled between Malmaison and Paris, for example, fell pitifully short of his goal. He managed to collect only thirty men. The group continued their preparations despite the lackluster turnout, and Lajolais informed the dissidents in London that the time was ripe for action. He reported that Frenchmen had tired of Napoleon’s voracious appetite for military glory and wanted to see him removed from power. He explained that bands of Royalists gathered frequently and openly in the capital city, plotting against the Consular government. Optimistic about the chance of success, Cadoudal and seven others arranged to head to France in August 1803.³¹³

Cadoudal and his travel companions did not enjoy a smooth journey to France. The hotheadedness that Cadoudal had hoped the *chouans* could overcome showed itself in Hastings, where three of the conspirators quarreled with an Englishman and found themselves placed

³¹¹ *Procès instruit par la cour de justice criminelle et spéciale du département de la Seine, séante à Paris contre Georges, Pichegru et autres, prévenus de conspiration contre la personne du premier Consul*, (Paris: C. F. Patris, 1804), 4: 442.

³¹² *Acte d’accusation de Georges, Pichegru, Moreau, et autres, prévenus de conspiration contre la personne du Premier Consul et contre la sûreté intérieure et extérieure de la République* (Paris: Imprimerie de C. F. Patris, an XII), 53.

³¹³ The first group of conspirators to make their way to France were: Georges Cadoudal, Villeneuve, Querelle (also called Courson), La Bonté (known as Kercher, but legally named Breche), Froché *filis*, Jean Marie (under the name Lemaire) and two men previously associated with the infernal machine plot of December 1800, Picot and Lahaye Saint-Hilaire.

under arrest.³¹⁴ When their leader arrived, he spoke with police officers and earned for his cohorts their freedom. Another misfortune, this time Cadoudal's, delayed the group yet again. On the morning they intended to leave, he awoke with an agonizing toothache. Although he feared having a tooth pulled, he insisted on seeing a dentist, who arrived and removed the tooth on the first attempt. Cadoudal was so pleased with his services that he "wanted to pay him royally."³¹⁵ The sum proposed by the *chouan* leader was five times what his companions considered appropriate. With the dentist's services rewarded—though not as handsomely as Cadoudal had wanted—the group of eight finally left England and sailed for Biville on the English cutter *Vencego*, captained by John Wesley Wright. A second group of men, seven in number, traveled from England to France, landing on 10 December 1803.³¹⁶ Lajolais traveled often between Paris and London, assuring his cohorts that everything was going according to plan: "the time and the circumstances were favorable . . . we must not waste time."³¹⁷ In early January 1804, Pichegru himself sailed, with Lajolais and four others, to France.³¹⁸

Over the months prior to Pichegru's voyage to France, he had sent secret letters to Moreau "relating to the possibility of a plot for the overthrow of Bonaparte, and the restoration of the Bourbons, and the chances of its success."³¹⁹ Pichegru's proposal designated three people, including himself, as leaders. Cadoudal was in charge of the physical attack against Napoleon in

³¹⁴ There is no account to explain about what the group had argued.

³¹⁵ Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal*, 296.

³¹⁶ This group included Coster Saint-Victor, who had been complicit in Saint-Réjant's infernal machine plot on 24 December 1800. His travel companions were Jean Marie (Lemaire), Armand Polignac, Jean Louis, Lemercier, Tamerlan, Lelan (called Brutus), and Pierre Jean.

³¹⁷ Bonaparte, *Correspondance*, 31: 268.

³¹⁸ The other travelers on this voyage were Ruzilion (known as Gros-Major), Jules Polignac (brother of Armand), Rochelle (known also as Rochette Brun and Richemont), and Armand Gaillard.

³¹⁹ Claude Charles Fauriel, *The Last Days of the Consulate*, translated by Ludovic Lalanne (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1886), 132-133.

the outskirts of Paris. After the First Consul's removal, Pichegru would meet with politicians in the capital to convince them that France's best hope for long-term peace and prosperity was under Bourbon leadership. With the First Consul nullified and the politicians considering the benefits of monarchical government, Moreau was to announce the restoration to the military and then lead a portion of them to Paris to maintain order while the Count of Provence reclaimed his throne. Moreau had never responded, finding "all of it so ridiculous" that the correspondence did not warrant consideration or an answer.³²⁰

If the Royalists believed that all they needed to achieve their goal was the death of Napoleon, a disgraced politician, and a former general, they were hopelessly naïve. Napoleon was the First Consul and held the majority of power in his hands, but there were, at least technically, two other Consuls who would continue to rule in the case of his death. At best, his death would result in a period of political instability and competition among those who hoped to replace him. The destruction of the entire Consular regime upon Napoleon's demise was unlikely. Pichegru stood no chance of convincing the politicians that France's best hope for peace and prosperity was a return to Bourbon control. His status as an outlaw, not only for his treasonous rapports and activities but for his escape from captivity, guaranteed that officials were more likely to arrest him on the spot than they were to be a captive audience for his political entreaties. As for Moreau, his chances of transforming the Republican-minded military into a monarchical defender were remote. He had not commanded troops personally for several years. His reputation remained respectable and solid, but it had as its foundation his devotion to the Republic. Despite the irrationality of their thinking, the Royalists had convinced themselves that the time was right to act against Napoleon, and they had placed all their hopes in Moreau.

³²⁰ *Acte d'accusation*, 72.

As soon as Pichegru and Moreau met in person, the Royalists' hopes were dashed. Despite Lajolais' reports to the contrary, Moreau still found the prospect of a Bourbon restoration ludicrous. He did not, however, oppose the replacement of the Consular government. The new regime, whatever its form, would need to have the people's support. Arbitrarily returning to monarchical governance without the consent of the nation was unacceptable. Moreau offered a counter plan: Cadoudal should act against the First Consul as planned, but afterwards, Moreau would place himself "at the head of the government, under the title of dictator."³²¹ Having passed on the opportunity to rule via the events of 18 Brumaire, he was determined not to miss another chance. Moreau proposed to inform the Senate of Napoleon's death. He believed that he had strong support among its members. "I will be given authority," he explained to Pichegru, "[and] I will use it to ensure your safety [that of the Royalists], and we will see then what opinion dictates."³²²

For the conspirators, the unexpected rejection of their plan, which they believed everyone had already accepted, resulted in "dissention and the almost total loss of the royalist party."³²³ Moreau's sudden expression of personal ambition disgusted Cadoudal, who wanted no part in any plot that did not return the Bourbons to power. "Usurper for usurper," he exclaimed to Pichegru, "I prefer Bonaparte to this Moreau! This one who has neither heart nor brain!"³²⁴ Without the general and, therefore, the French military on their side, the conspirators were not willing to take further action. A fourth group of supporters from England, including a person of

³²¹ *Acte d'accusation*, 56.

³²² *Procès Instruit*, 7: 451.

³²³ *Acte d'accusation*, 55.

³²⁴ Paul Philippe de Ségur, *Histoire et mémoires* (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot frères, fils et cie, 1873), 2: 246.

great importance,” cancelled their crossing upon learning of Moreau’s betrayal.³²⁵ The men who had come to France on the three previous voyages, however, now found themselves without an escape plan.

Since January 1801, when a suspect first mentioned Cadoudal, whose “very presence in Paris is proof of a conspiracy,” according to officials, Napoleon had ordered the gates of Paris closed and had all comings and goings closely monitored.³²⁶ Within the first two weeks of February 1804, the police arrested at least seventeen of the conspirators, including three key figures: Picot, Bouvet de Lozier, and Lajolais. The testimony of these men thoroughly implicated Moreau, whose respected friends in the government and military insisted was not a conspirator. Picot portrayed Moreau as a key participant, but one whose involvement had caused controversy from the outset. It was not, according to the defendant’s testimony, Cadoudal or even Pichegru who had thought of including Moreau in the plot. Instead, it was the royal brothers themselves who insisted that the group bring the general into the fold. His participation would, they believed, ensure the participation of the French military at large. According to Picot, “the chiefs frequently repeated, *in front of him*, that they were angry that the princes had brought Moreau into the affair.”³²⁷ The general’s sudden rejection of the Royalists and their plot surely angered them even more.

Lajolais’ testimony proved the communications and face-to-face meetings between Moreau and Pichegru. According to him, however, the interactions were not conspiratorial.

³²⁵ Bonaparte, *Correspondance*, 31: 329.

³²⁶ French police arrested Jean-Pierre Querelle shortly after his arrival from England. He faced charges of treason and received the death penalty. He offered to confess all he knew if it would save his life. Querelle explained that Cadoudal had arrived in Paris in August and that a plot was in place to attack Napoleon and his escort on the road between Paris and Malmaison. *Acte d’accusation*, 52.

³²⁷ Original emphasis. *Acte d’accusation*, 67.

Pichegru simply wanted to learn whether Moreau would support his return to France. Moreau favored his friend's homecoming and promised not to act against his efforts to gain reentry. Given Pichegru's criminal status, reuniting the friends required clandestine means. His presence in Paris—or in France in general—was illegal, which no one disputed. But it did not, Lajolais claimed, equate to a conspiracy against the government. His co-defendants testified almost unanimously against the innocence of the interactions. It was Lajolais, one declared, who "had said in England that Moreau was prepared to serve the princes."³²⁸ There is a significant difference between reporting that Moreau approved of Pichegru's return to France and reporting that he would support and assist with the restoration of Bourbon leadership. If the defendants knew that Pichegru was planning a conspiracy, they could have assumed that Lajolais' message of Moreau's friendship was a sign that he shared their Royalist ideology. The assumption is tenuous, at best.

The confessions of Bouvet de Lozier was the most condemning of Moreau. The Bourbons had known that they needed the support of the French military if they hoped to regain control of the nation. Believing they had found a strong proponent in Moreau, they launched into action. The general's sudden change of opinion resulted in complete disaster for the men involved and for the cause as a whole.³²⁹ Disgusted with his situation and depressed over the Royalists' failed efforts, Bouvet de Lozier had attempted to kill himself in his cell at the Temple prison. Unfortunately for him, a guard found him on the brink of death and saved his life. While

³²⁸ Jacques-François Lecourbe, *Opinion sur la conspiration de Moreau, Pichegru et autres, sur la non-culpabilité de Moreau, et procès-verbal de ce qui s'est passé à la chambre du conseil, entre les juges, relativement à ce général* (Paris: Chez Gabriel Warée, 1814), 24.

³²⁹ *Recueil des interrogatoires subis par le Général Moreau, des interrogatoires de quelques-uns de ses co-accusés, des procès-verbaux de confrontation, et autres pièces produits au soutien de l'accusation dirigée contre ce général* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, an XII), 41-42.

“surrounded by doctors, still purple, his traits altered by the strangulation,” he began spouting vehement assertions against Moreau.³³⁰ He exclaimed, in a fit of rage: “We have been betrayed How many brave men will die because of this traitor Moreau who double-crossed us! He told us that the army was his; he had Pichegru and so many of our other best men come from London, and, once arrived, he abandons us and we will die his victims.”³³¹ The furious tirade of a man who had just attempted to kill himself might not be entirely convincing. Even during his official and orderly depositions, however, Bouvet de Lozier maintained his stance that Moreau had been one of the chief conspirators and that it was his betrayal that condemned everyone else.

Moreau was popular among the French public as well as among the French military. His previous service to the nation and his solid reputation necessitated caution and conclusive proof of his involvement before police could take action against him. When an officer proposed to Napoleon that Bouvet de Lozier’s testimony was sufficient for Moreau’s arrest, the First Consul disagreed. He wanted more evidence. “Prove to me,” Napoleon answered, “that Pichegru is here and I will sign the arrest warrant for Moreau.”³³² Minister of Justice Claude Ambroise Régnier ordered the interrogation of Pichegru’s brother, a former monk, at his home. Not wanting to get himself caught in any legal trouble, he immediately confessed to police that he had, in fact, “seen his brother three times over the last ten days and that he had criticized him for coming and for exposing himself to an ignominious death, like a criminal.”³³³ Napoleon ordered Moreau’s arrest.

³³⁰ Bonaparte, *Correspondance*, 31: 270.

³³¹ Bonaparte, *Correspondance*, 31: 270.

³³² Philippe-Joseph-Benjamin Buchez and P.-C. Roux, *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française ou journal des assemblées nationales depuis 1789 jusqu’en 1815* (Paris: Paulin, 1838), 39: 68.

³³³ Bonaparte, *Correspondance*, 31: 270.

On 17 February 1804, Moreau was making his way back to Paris from his estate at Grosbois when his driver suddenly stopped about halfway through the trip. Moreau alighted from the carriage to find a police colonel with orders to arrest him and to take him to the Temple prison in Paris. Bursting out laughing, Moreau agreed to follow him back to the capital. Once he arrived, he demanded to see the arrest warrant for himself. His mood immediately changed: “as soon as he read the names of Georges and Pichegru, he turned pale and seemed confused, whereas he had previously seemed relaxed.”³³⁴

During Moreau’s first interrogation, which took place on the night of his arrest, he denied ever having any personal or direct relationship with Cadoudal, explaining that he knew him by reputation only. Moreau stated that he had not communicated with Pichegru since the events of 18 Fructidor. He had, however, recently spoken with Lajolais, a former officer of his, on several occasions, who had visited Moreau at his home “to ask for letters of recommendation in order to be employed.”³³⁵ In a second interrogation, Moreau admitted that a former secretary of his had asked him, in only the most general terms, about his thoughts on overthrowing the Consular government in favor of a Bourbon restoration. Moreau replied that such a plan “would be of the utmost folly.”³³⁶

After a month and a half in prison, Moreau realized that his co-conspirators had shared specific details and had implicated them all. On 30 March, he learned of the testimonies of Henri-Odille-Pierre-Jean Roland, whom officers had arrested on 14 February. Understanding that his fellow suspects were not maintaining their silence, Moreau had no choice but to reveal the truth about his interactions with them. He admitted to the truthfulness of Roland’s

³³⁴ Bonaparte, *Correspondance*, 31: 271.

³³⁵ *Recueil des interrogatoires*, 5.

³³⁶ *Recueil des interrogatoires*, 7.

deposition. He explained that Roland had told him that Pichegru was in Paris and that he wanted to meet. Skeptical about the intentions behind the meeting, Moreau sent his secretary to speak with Pichegru. Before he could return, however, Pichegru arrived unannounced and unexpected at Moreau's residence. The two spoke for a while about their personal lives before Pichegru suggested to Moreau the idea of replacing the Consular regime with the Bourbon monarchy. Moreau retorted that the monarchy had no friends in France and "that the government was so consolidated that wanting to attack it was the utmost folly."³³⁷ His rejection of the proposal ended the meeting. On the following day, Roland returned to Moreau's home, upset that he had not agreed to support the Royalists. Angrily, Roland asked whether he had his own "ambitions of authority."³³⁸ Moreau answered that such aspirations "would be yet another folly."³³⁹ It was a folly that Moreau expounded upon: "in order for me to have such aspirations, it would be necessary to eradicate the Bonaparte family, the Consulate, the governor of Paris, the Consuls' guard, etc."³⁴⁰

Arrested on 27 February and transported to the Temple prison, Pichegru insisted throughout his interrogations on his innocence in and ignorance of any plot against Napoleon or his government. During his first interview, he denied knowing or interacting with any of his supposed associates in London or Paris. He admitted to knowing Lajolais, but explained that he had not seen him in two years. When officials brought Bouvet de Lozier and Picot into the interrogation room to confront Pichegru, both men identified him by name and without hesitation. For his part, however, Pichegru denied knowing them.³⁴¹ When Prefect of Police

³³⁷ *Recueil des interrogatoires*, 27.

³³⁸ *Recueil des interrogatoires*, 27.

³³⁹ *Recueil des interrogatoires*, 27.

³⁴⁰ *Recueil des interrogatoires*, 28.

³⁴¹ *Recueil des interrogatoires*, 104-106.

Louis-Nicolas-Pierre-Joseph Dubois asked him why he had come back to France, the suspect's answer was simple: "Because I am tired of being in a foreign country."³⁴²

While Moreau and Pichegru disavowed any knowledge of a conspiracy, Georges Cadoudal reveled in it. On 9 March, police arrested him, but only after he fatally shot one officer and seriously wounded another. Pichegru proclaimed that he had returned to France as if from boredom; Cadoudal proudly announced his treacherous intentions. When asked what brought him to Paris, he answered: "I came to attack the First Consul."³⁴³ Attempting to take full responsibility for the scheme, he told police that he was the only person actually involved at the time. He specifically denied knowing of Pichegru's involvement and claimed never to have seen or known Moreau.³⁴⁴ The force he needed to attack Napoleon, he believed, would come from "all of France" when the time came.³⁴⁵ Although he admitted to planning an attack on the First Consul, Cadoudal made it clear that he did not intend to cause the death of Napoleon. He had once explained to a fellow conspirator that he was looking forward to being responsible for the First Consul's captivity: "The First Consul had me put in the tower of the Temple; if I can abduct him, I will have him put in the Tower of London."³⁴⁶

Several other defendants agreed that they had not planned to murder Napoleon. Two of the conspirators told police that the group planned to abduct the First Consul and then to deliver him to England.³⁴⁷ An account of Cadoudal's life, written by his nephew, brings Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger into the discussion. Pitt hoped the conspirators could "avoid at all

³⁴² *Recueil des interrogatoires*, 100.

³⁴³ *Recueil des interrogatoires*, 115.

³⁴⁴ *Recueil des interrogatoires*, 120.

³⁴⁵ *Recueil des interrogatoires*, 118.

³⁴⁶ Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal*, 302.

³⁴⁷ *Acte d'accusation*, 65-66.

costs mortally wounding Bonaparte.”³⁴⁸ He wanted the First Consul delivered to England, from where the English government would imprison or exile him.³⁴⁹

The conspirators had differing understandings of the scheme. During the testimonies, the defendants divided almost equally over the issue of whether the First Consul’s death was their goal. One explained that the best hope for restoring the Bourbons to power “was to destroy the little Corporal.”³⁵⁰ According to Lajolais’ testimony, it was not only the First Consul who would lose his life if the conspiracy succeeded. He recounted for police a conversation he had with Cadoudal in which the *chouan* leader described his desire “to kill all those who showed opposition” to the Royalists.³⁵¹ The idea that Cadoudal was willing to kill anyone who opposed his progress but was not willing to murder Napoleon is curious. The most likely explanation is that he was willing to do whatever he deemed necessary to achieve a Bourbon restoration, regardless of the death count. Picot supported the argument that the conspirators would do what the moment necessitated, explaining to police that they “wanted to abduct Napoleon . . . or to assassinate him.”³⁵²

Even more disconcerting for Napoleon than the plot itself was the admission of multiple conspirators that “a prince of royal blood” was on his way to France to head the Bourbon restoration.³⁵³ Having first learned of the unnamed prince’s involvement in January 1801, the First Consul immediately ordered police to investigate who this dangerous guest might be.

³⁴⁸ Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal*, 296.

³⁴⁹ Cadoudal’s nephew states that the English government had already chosen St. Helena as Napoleon’s place of exile, should the opportunity present itself. There is no evidence to support the claim. Surely St. Helena was on the list of possibilities, but it was not a foregone conclusion. Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal*, 296.

³⁵⁰ *Acte d’accusation*, 84.

³⁵¹ *Acte d’accusation*, 71.

³⁵² *Acte d’accusation*, 67.

³⁵³ Louis Georges de Cadoudal, *Georges Cadoudal*, 305.

Depositions by the conspirators in February and March did not shed much light on the subject. Cadoudal explained the obvious when he expressed his desire to see the restoration of “Charles-Xavier Stanislas, formerly *Monsieur*, recognized by us as Louis XVIII.”³⁵⁴ It was not this prince, however, that would lead the attack on Napoleon. Only after the Royalists calmed the military situation would Louis XVIII return to his country. In his next response, Cadoudal mentioned another prince, without naming him specifically, who would assist with the conspiracy from Paris.

Napoleon’s police began gathering information about the whereabouts and activities of the Bourbon heirs. The process revealed that the most likely candidate to participate in Cadoudal’s plot was Louis-Antoine-Henri de Bourbon, the Duke d’Enghien. He lived at Ettenheim in Baden, from where he could easily travel into France. In their effort to tamp down Royalist efforts at regaining political power, the Revolutionary governments had passed laws decreeing that any *émigré* “who had taken up arms against France would be arrested, whether in France, in an enemy or conquered country, [and] would be judged within twenty-four hours.”³⁵⁵ Despite the laws, the Duke d’Enghien had traveled frequently to Strasbourg to watch theatre performances. Anne-Jean-Marie-René Savary, who was in charge of Napoleon’s personal guards, argued in favor of Enghien’s involvement with Cadoudal: “if he exposed himself to such

³⁵⁴ *Recueil des interrogatoires*, 119.

³⁵⁵ The laws specifically cited against the Duke d’Enghien were those of 28 March 1793 and 25 Brumaire III. André Marie Jean Jacques Dupin, *Pièces judiciaires et historiques relatives au procès du duc d’Enghien, avec le journal de ce prince depuis l’instant de son arrestation, précédées de la discussion des actes de la commission militaire instituée en l’an XII, par le gouvernement consulaire, pour juger le duc d’Enghien* (Paris: Baudouin frères, 1823), 10-11.

danger for a gratification of that kind, he would not be deterred by perils when a higher interest was at stake.”³⁵⁶

Concerned by the Duke d’Enghien’s daring nature and his close proximity to France, Napoleon ordered an officer to travel to Ettenheim to investigate the royal. Having heard conversations about his target being the prime suspect, the officer wanted to satisfy the government with his reports. He learned that Enghien was an avid hunter who often disappeared for days at a time on expeditions. He also verified Enghien’s travels to Strasbourg, where his mistress lived. Residents of Ettenheim described to the officer the relatively quiet life enjoyed by the Duke. He often hosted dinner parties for his friends, many of whom were *émigrés* like himself. The Duke received money from England on a monthly basis, but only enough to cover living expenses. Nothing that the officer learned pointed to conspiratorial activities. Not wanting to disappoint, however, he reported to his superiors “that the Duke d’Enghien led a mysterious life; that he was frequently visited by emigrants; that he supported them; and that he was frequently absent eight, ten, or twelve days, without anyone knowing whither he went.”³⁵⁷ The officer believed he had another, more dangerous, discovery to share. Among the *émigrés* who frequented Enghien’s home was General Dumouriez. This bit of information was also incorrect, but through no intentional misrepresentation by the officer. He had simply misunderstood the Germans he spoke with when they referred to the Marquis of Thumery.³⁵⁸

With the alarming information in mind, Napoleon ordered the arrest of the Duke d’Enghien. According to Enghien, “approximately two hundred men total” violated the

³⁵⁶ Anne-Jean-Marie-René Savary, *Memoirs of the Duke of Rovigo (M. Savary), Written by Himself, Illustrative of the History of the Emperor Napoleon* (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), 1: 35.

³⁵⁷ Savary, *Memoirs*, 1: 35.

³⁵⁸ Abbott, *History of Napoleon*, 427.

sovereign state of Baden and arrived at his residence to place him under arrest on 15 March.³⁵⁹

Within the week, he arrived at the château of Vincennes on the outskirts of Paris. It was here that a military commission had assembled to judge his crimes. They announced to the Duke that the Consular government “suspected him of having taken up arms against the republic; of having been and of still being in the pay of England; of being part of the conspiracies hatched by England against the interior and exterior security of the republic.”³⁶⁰ The tribunal questioned him about his relationship with various conspirators back in Paris. He explained that he had never met Pichegru, though he “knows that he wanted to see me.”³⁶¹ He denied having any rapport with General Dumouriez whatsoever. He admitted to receiving money England, but described it as a stipend for daily expenses, not as payment for any kind of services rendered. The military commission also questioned him about his interaction with fellow Bourbons. He acknowledged being in communication with his relatives, which he considered a common practice for anyone.

The line of questioning then turned to the conspiracy itself. Enghien denied knowing about any kind of plot. The Royalists were not scheming, he contended, and “if it were true, his father and grandfather would have made him acquainted with it.”³⁶² During the testimony, General Pierre-Augustin Hulin felt that the Duke was not taking the trial seriously. He found his answers flippant and condescending, when the defendant bothered to respond at all. He implored him to reconsider his approach given the seriousness of the allegations. Enghien replied to

³⁵⁹ Dupin, *Pièces judiciaires*, v.

³⁶⁰ Dupin, *Pièces judiciaires*, ix.

³⁶¹ Dupin, *Pièces judiciaires*, xvi.

³⁶² Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, *Private Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte, During the Periods of the Directory, the Consulate and the Empire* (Philadelphia: Carey and Les, 1831), 2: 18.

Hulin's appeal and to the final question concerning his orders from England. In so doing, he concluded the trial: "I perfectly comprehend you; it was not my intention to remain indifferent to them: I had applied to England for an appointment in her armies; and she had returned for answer that she had none to give me, but that I was to remain upon the Rhine, where I should soon have a part to act, and for that I was waiting."³⁶³

Enghien's testimony about waiting for word from England before launching into action did not settle the judges' minds. He did not seem aware of a *specific* conspiracy underway but was clearly expecting one at some point. His willingness to accept instructions from a foreign nation and to bear arms against his country sealed his fate. The seven members of the military commission deliberated for no more than two hours. They voted unanimously that he was guilty on all charges and sentenced him to death. When told to kneel for the firing squad only a few hours after receiving his verdict, Enghien retorted, "a Bourbon . . . does not bend the knee except before God."³⁶⁴

Debates have taken place since the execution over the motivations behind it. One of Napoleon's former private secretaries, Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, recorded in his memoirs that the First Consul believed the death of Enghien was "indispensable to his accession to the crown of France."³⁶⁵ Bourrienne did not believe that Enghien was part of Cadoudal's conspiracy or that he had done anything illegal otherwise.³⁶⁶ He described a scenario in which an unnamed person had previously attempted to convince Enghien to participate in a plot to

³⁶³ Savary, *Memoirs*, 1: 42.

³⁶⁴ Dupin, *Pièces judiciaires*, 31.

³⁶⁵ Bourrienne, *Private Memoirs*, 2: 18.

³⁶⁶ Under Revolutionary law, any instance of a Frenchman bearing arms against his country qualified as treason, which was punishable by death. Even if Enghien was not involved with Cadoudal, his willingness to work for and with England warranted his execution from a legal standpoint.

assassinate Napoleon. Despite his support of his relatives' claim to the throne, Enghien had declined the murderous opportunity. With no more detail—a date, a name—the claim is not entirely convincing. The secretary argued that Napoleon trumped up the treasonous charges in order “to strike a blow which would terrify his enemies.”³⁶⁷ He also claimed that the execution was the First Consul's method for upholding his part of a bargain he made with the Jacobins. In order to gain their support for his ascension to the throne, “Bonaparte consented to sacrifice a victim of the blood royal.”³⁶⁸ That Napoleon would broker such a deal with the Jacobins—or with anyone—is unlikely. He had only recently exiled dozens of the Republicans after the explosion on the rue Saint Nicaise in December 1800. He also understood that there was a chance for the royal families of Europe to react violently to Enghien's execution. Napoleon would not lightly risk making additional enemies or inciting neutralized ones to renewed hostilities if it was not necessary.

Other contemporaries disagreed with Bourrienne's conclusions concerning Napoleon's motivations. Laure Junot, Duchess of Abrantès, contended that Enghien's death was not necessary for the First Consul to transition the government to its imperial form: “the Imperial crown, placed by the unanimous wish of France on the head of Napoleon, would have been no less solid and legitimate . . . had the Duc d'Enghien never stirred from Ettenheim.”³⁶⁹ Savary also argued against Bourrienne's conclusions concerning Napoleon's motivations. Enghien's execution resulted not from the First Consul's selfish ambition but from misinformation and overly zealous officials. According to the head of the Consular Guard, no one was to act against

³⁶⁷ Bourrienne, *Private Memoirs*, 2: 22.

³⁶⁸ Bourrienne, *Private Memoirs*, 2: 22.

³⁶⁹ Laure Junot, *Memoirs of the Emperor Napoleon: from Ajaccio to Waterloo, as Soldier, Emperor, Husband* (Akron, OH: St. Dunstan Society, 1901), 2: 206.

Enghien after his capture until Counselor of State Pierre-François Réal interrogated him. The plan was to confront him with two of the conspirators from Paris. Only after they identified him would he face trial.³⁷⁰ News that the trial and execution had already taken place surprised Réal, who had the unfortunate task of reporting it to Napoleon. When the First Consul learned what had taken place, he “became thoughtful and . . . expressed by an exclamation of sorrow the regret which he felt at having consented to the seizure of the Duke d’Enghien.”³⁷¹ According to historian Frank McLynn, the First Consul “was singularly ill-served on this occasion by all his henchmen.”³⁷² There was no mention of Enghien during any of the proceedings concerning Cadoudal or his cohorts. Napoleon would have had no reason to arrest him if the officer who traveled to Ettenheim had returned with an accurate report.

Among Frenchmen at the time, news of Enghien’s death produced little effect. They viewed it as the necessary and appropriate fate of someone who dared conspire against the First Consul. Savary reported that Parisians believed the Duke “had made himself the chief of the corps of emigrants, and that all of the conspiracies against the life of the First Consul had been hatched for his sole benefit.”³⁷³ The royal families across Europe had a more raucous reaction to Enghien’s execution, though none took serious action against Napoleon or his regime. Russian Czar Alexander I had the most profound reaction. He responded by “breaking off all diplomatic relations with France, ordering the Russian court into official mourning, sending a strong note of protest to Paris, and abruptly demanding that French troops be withdrawn from Hanover and Neapolitan ports.”³⁷⁴ Other rulers wrote letters to the First Consul denouncing the execution, but

³⁷⁰ Savary, *Memoirs*, 1: 49.

³⁷¹ Savary, *Memoirs*, 1: 50.

³⁷² Frank McLynn, *Napoleon: A Biography* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2002), np.

³⁷³ Savary, *Memoirs*, 1: 45.

³⁷⁴ Adams, *Napoleon and Russia* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), 80.

nothing more came of it. All in all, Enghien's execution had only positive consequences for Napoleon. It did not damage his reputation among his citizens, and it effectively ended the threat of Royalist conspiracies for the remainder of his rule.

There was someone whom the execution of Enghien gravely affected: Pichegru. On the morning of 6 April 1804, guards at the Temple prison reported to Counselor of State Réal and Consular Guard Savary that they had found Pichegru dead in his cell. Upon arriving, the two superior officers discovered the prisoner strangled by "a black silk handkerchief and the bar from a chair which tightened the cloth."³⁷⁵ The police and medical officers concluded that the prisoner had committed suicide. According to some accounts, Pichegru was "the most unhappy and the most pitiable of the accused; he had not a single supporter in France."³⁷⁶ He faced the same charges as his fellow defendants but also had to cope with the memories of his previous treasons and his banishment from France. Some sources have concluded that his depression, coupled with the news of Enghien's execution, pushed him beyond his breaking point.³⁷⁷

Some contemporaries argued at the time that Pichegru had not, in fact, committed suicide but that Napoleon had ordered his murder. Bourrienne contended that Napoleon had his police officials harass Pichegru during his internment at the Temple. He claimed that the prisoner endured ten interrogations, many more than his fellow conspirators. Réal, who was present at each of the interviews, recalled only four.³⁷⁸ Whatever the number of sessions, Pichegru refused to provide any valuable information. He was careful not to implicate himself or his co-

³⁷⁵ *Archives Nationales*, 207/AP/3.

³⁷⁶ C. M. Pierret, *Pichegru, son procès et son suicide* (Paris: Imprimerie de Gaultier-Laguionie, 1825), 45.

³⁷⁷ Pierret, *Pichegru*, 4-5.

³⁷⁸ The source material supports Réal's recollection of Pichegru's interrogations. If other interviews took place, the officers did not record them.

defendants in any illegal undertakings. He did, however, imply that he would happily reveal all once the actual trial was underway. Bourrienne postulated that Napoleon feared the information Pichegru might divulge during the proceedings. He does not speculate on what the information might have been but argued that the First Consul did not want it made public. Bourrienne did not argue his case convincingly enough. If Napoleon had wanted Pichegru murdered, he could have had it done during his arrest, which would have appeared less suspicious. Likewise, given Pichegru's previous treason against the French government, it is unlikely that the judges would have believed any allegations he levied against the First Consul. Regardless of his participation in the current conspiracy, his previous actions in 1797 rendered his reputation and his word worthless. If Pichegru did not simply commit suicide—which is, in fact, the most likely explanation—the most probable murderer was one of his co-defendants. If, as Bourrienne contended, all of Pichegru's "declarations . . . gave reason to believe that he would speak out, and that too in a lofty and energetic manner during the progress of the trial," his associates might have wanted to silence him.³⁷⁹ There is no evidence to support that the suspect's death was anything more than a suicide.

Pichegru did not live to experience the trial. The forty-five people other suspects arrested on charges of conspiracy against the state and against the life of Napoleon did. During the trial, each of the witnesses continued recounting the information they had given during their previous depositions. No new revelations came from the latest testimonies. With everyone naming names and pointing fingers, evidence of guilt was rampant. They had not managed to take any action against the First Consul but they had concocted a loose plan for doing so. In terms of the law, plotting an assassination carried the same weight as executing it. On 10 June 1804, the judges

³⁷⁹ Bourrienne, *Private Memoirs*, 2: 240.

ultimately found twenty of the conspirators, including Cadoudal, guilty on all counts and sentenced them to death.³⁸⁰ The court found five others guilty but contended that they did not play as large a role in the plot. Their lesser roles, coupled with services previously rendered to the State, earned them more lenient sentences. The court sentenced these five men, including Moreau, to two years in prison.³⁸¹ The remaining twenty-one suspects found themselves acquitted of all charges concerning conspiracy.³⁸² Five of them did not earn their immediate freedom, however, as they had housed some of the conspirators without declaring it to police, as required by law.³⁸³

³⁸⁰ The other condemned men were: François-Louis Rusillion, Étienne-François Rochelle, Armand-François-Heraclius Polignac, Abraham-Charles-Augustin d'Hozier, Charles-François de Rivière, Louis Ducorps, Louis Picot, Michel Roger, Jean-Baptiste Coster Saint-Victor, Victor Deville, Armand Gaillard, Aimé-Augustin-Alexis Joyau, Louis-Gabriel-Marie Burban, Guillaume Lemercier, Pierre-Jean Cadoudal, Jean Lelan, and Jean Mérille. *Procès Instruit*, 6: 408-409.

³⁸¹ The other men sentenced to imprisonment were: Jules-Armand-Auguste Polignac, Louis Lérissant, Henri-Odille-Pierre-Jean Roland, and Marie-Michel Hizay. *Procès Instruit*, 6: 410.

³⁸² Those acquitted were Victor Couchery, Pierre David, Michel Hervé, Claude Lenoble, Yves-Marie-Joseph-Rubin Lagrimaudière, Noël Ducorps, Nicolas Datry, Joseph-Laurent Even, Gaston Troche, Michel-Joseph-Pierre Troche, Pierre Monnier, Marie-Anne Collasse (wife of Monnier), Jacques Verdet, Pierre-Antoine Spin, Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Dubuisson, Madeleine-Sophie Lambotte (wife of Dubuisson), Marie-Antoine Carron, Simon-René Gallais, Jeanne-Aimée-Françoise Guérard (wife of Gallais), Jean-Baptiste Denand, and Sophie Duval (wife of Denand). *Procès Instruit*, 6: 412.

³⁸³ The legislative body of the Consular regime had passed a law on 29 February 1804 prohibiting people from providing shelter to Cadoudal or any of his fellow conspirators. The first article of the law provided that housing a conspirator “would be judged and punished like the principal crime” of conspiracy itself. Article two promised no punishment to anyone who reported within twenty-four hours that conspirators had been in his home. Article three declared that anyone who failed to make such a report would find themselves sentenced to six years in irons. The fourth and final article explained that there would be no punishment for people who had housed the conspirators at an earlier point. The hope was that the serious consequences associated with providing shelter to the conspirators would help police locate those who remained at large at this point, namely Cadoudal. The five defendants who faced charges of harboring the conspirators were Verdet, Dubuisson, Lambotte, Denand, and Duval. *Archives parlementaires; recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des chambres françaises de 1800 à 1860 faisant suite à la réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur et comprenant un grand nombre de nouveaux documents*, vol. 5: *du 7 floréal an XI (27 avril 1802) au 17 pluviôse an XII*

On the morning of 25 June 1804, as the twenty condemned men prepared to travel to the Place de Grève to face the firing squad, Napoleon intervened on behalf of eight of the prisoners. In his letter, the Emperor wrote that he favored leniency for some of the criminals and transmuted their death penalties to deportation. Bouvet de Lozier received clemency because of the detailed nature of his testimony. Some contemporaries implied that it was his willingness to denounce Moreau that earned him a lighter punishment.³⁸⁴ In his memoirs, Bourrienne argued that Lajolais had made a deal with authorities prior to the trial in order to avoid the death penalty.³⁸⁵ Petitions from relatives, politicians and military officials spared the lives of the other six men. The firing squad executed the remaining twelve conspirators at 11:00 a.m.

Between the time of the conspirators' arrest and their execution, Napoleon had taken advantage of the situation their plot provided and had ascended the throne of France as Emperor of the French. In May 1804, likely at his own prompting, the Senate had proposed that he take the imperial title. Napoleon accepted, with the justification that such an action would "shelter the French people from the plots of our enemies and the unrest that would arise from rival ambitions."³⁸⁶ The thinking was sound, but it implies that the Consular regime would crumble automatically upon the First Consul's death. The immediate destruction of a Republican government upon the death of its leader might have been unlikely, though given the chaos of the Revolution and its numerous regimes, the paranoia of Frenchmen concerning such a matter is forgivable. The Senate ratified the political promotion in the same month, and Napoleon began

(7 février 1804), (Paris: Librairie administrative de Paul Dupont, 1865), 692. *Procès Instruit*, 6: 412-413.

³⁸⁴ Bourrienne, *Life of Napoleon*, 2: 277.

³⁸⁵ Bourrienne, *Life of Napoleon*, 2: 277.

³⁸⁶ Philip Dwyer, *Citizen Emperor: Napoleon in Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 128.

actively using his new title. Upon hearing of the nation's new regime, Cadoudal is said to have lamented: "We have done more than we hoped to do; we meant to give France a King, and we have given her an Emperor."³⁸⁷

Before the nation received the opportunity to vote on the creation of the French Empire, pamphlets ensured everyone was of the same opinion. They explained that the Revolution had not overthrown the Bourbon monarchy because the institution was undesirable but because the dynasty was no longer worthy of leading. The argument was, therefore, that reinstating a monarchy under Bonaparte's leadership was preferable to the uncertainty of representative government. The Emperor did not intend to remove the citizens' voices from government completely, and thus a plebiscite took place on 6 November 1804. The results followed suit with what the government expected. The nation approved of the transition to the French Empire rather than the French Republic overwhelmingly: 3,572,329 to 2,569.³⁸⁸ The new imperial title brought Napoleon more prestige and a lengthy—but not permanent—reprieve from conspiratorial plots.

³⁸⁷ Felix Markam, *Napoleon* (New York: Signet, 1963), 113.

³⁸⁸ Steven Englund, *Napoleon: A Political Life* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 235.

CHAPTER SIX GENERAL MALET, 1812

A Chinese proverb advises to “keep your friends close, but your enemies closer.” One enemy Napoleon never managed to hold close enough was General Claude-François de Malet. In 1808, Malet found himself under arrest for having organized an attempt to overthrow the imperial government. Even after this failure, he was not ready to silence his dissatisfaction with the regime. Nevertheless, despite his frequent prison breaks and constant denunciations of both Napoleon and his government, few people looked upon Malet as a serious threat. Opinion would change after the night of 22 October 1812. On this occasion, Malet not only escaped his confines but also managed to arrest several key political figures. The event, simply known as the Malet Conspiracy (or the Malet Affair), was the single most successful coup attempted against the Napoleonic regime.

It is necessary to evaluate various portrayals of General Malet and to discern his true character and motive for attempting to overthrow the Empire. Many secondary sources that mention the conspiracy only in a sentence or two, as is generally the case in more recent works, do not provide any information or background on who the general was or why he had plotted against Napoleon. Accounts of the conspiracy written during the mid to late nineteenth-century typically portray Malet either as an ingenious political dissident or as a madman. More recent accounts opt for an objective view, depicting him as a frustrated anti-Bonapartist, rarely calling his mental health into question.

As one of the few books that deals exclusively with Malet’s conspiracy, Max Billard’s *La Conspiration de Malet* (1907) is invaluable. Billard’s narrow focus allows for a more detailed account of the events of 22 October 1812 than other authors provide. For example, in discussing La Force, the prison in which Malet and several of his cohorts served sentences, Billard not only

describes the building but also gives specific information on its location. He also paints an interestingly eccentric portrait of General Malet, a man he clearly finds psychologically disturbed.

Émile Marco de Saint-Hilaire depicts the general, instead, as an enterprising political dissident set on overthrowing what he considered to be an oppressive regime in order to restore the true meaning of the Revolution's ideals to France. In the version of Malet's conspiracy provided in his book *Histoire des conspirations et attentats contre le gouvernement et la personne de Napoléon* (1847), Saint-Hilaire argues that the general wanted to rid France of Napoleon from the moment he seized power as First Consul.³⁸⁹

Specific details can vary, even among those authors who consider Malet an ardent, though sane, supporter of Republican-styled government. In their memoirs, several people portray Malet as a man who did not care on whom he stepped in his pursuit to overthrow Napoleon. The depictions of Malet's alleged accomplices by such authors often exude a sense of sympathy, describing them as innocent fools tricked into participating in the plot. During his attempt to overthrow the imperial regime, Malet successfully deceived several high-ranking military officials, prompting them to place their troops under his control. The willingness of the common National Guardsman to follow the orders issued by their superiors is not surprising. The readiness with which their superiors, even among those Napoleon considered his most trustworthy devotees, followed Malet's orders without question, however, speaks to the fragility of the Empire.

³⁸⁹ Émile Marco de Saint-Hilaire, *Histoire des conspirations et attentats contre le gouvernement et la personne de Napoléon* (Paris: Charles Fellens, 1847), 332.

In *Napoleon: A Biography* (1997), Frank McLynn argues that Malet's conspiracy was not a serious threat to the empire. He seems unfamiliar with the plot as a whole, however, arguing that it lacked a clear goal. He describes the conspirators as a group of men, consisting of Republicans and Monarchists alike, who would decide what form the new government should take only after removing Napoleon from power.³⁹⁰ Based on the primary source documents, however, it is clear that Malet had every intention of creating some sort of Republic with himself at its head, at least in the provisional stages.

Memoirs of Bonaparte's supporters who witnessed, unwittingly participated in, or lived through Malet's plot often insinuate that the general suffered from psychological deficiencies. This claim is largely unconvincing. While some of Malet's actions certainly could indicate a degree of instability, they were more likely honest attempts against the Napoleonic government, though badly timed, and even more poorly executed, by a passionate Republican.

Many historians may deem the 1812 conspiracy insignificant, yet accounts contemporary to the events assert otherwise. Fearing that his Empire was on the verge of collapse, Napoleon chose to hasten his return to Paris from Russia after hearing of the events set into motion by Malet on 22 October. Conversations between Napoleon and the officials with him in Russia clearly show that the Emperor was deeply distraught over the level of success that the general's plot managed. Even more disturbing to him was the meekness with which his most trusted officials in Paris had "accepted a change of regime, without even giving a thought to the existence of the empress or the king of Rome."³⁹¹ After the events instigated by Malet, it

³⁹⁰ Frank McLynn, *Napoleon: A Biography* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2002), 540.

³⁹¹ J. Christopher Herold, *The Age of Napoleon* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963), 370.

became clear to Napoleon that running an imperial government required close, personal supervision, especially in the homeland of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*.

On 22 October 1812, General Claude-François de Malet's expressive and determined reddish-brown eyes gazed onto the rainy streets of Paris from a window in Dr. Jacquelin Dubuisson's rest home. Nearly sixty years old, the tall, thin, but well-proportioned man with hair powdered in an outdated style appeared to be a charming and pleasant grandfather. He was, in fact, a dangerous political malcontent. The city was suffering, he believed, under the oppressive rule of a tyrant. Despite numerous plebiscites validating Napoleon Bonaparte's regime, the current state of affairs had not been part of the accepted deal. The Revolutionary qualities that he had pledged to uphold—*liberté, égalité, and fraternité*—began disappearing as soon as he took power. Some French citizens believed such decline foreshadowed society's return to a system similar to the Bourbon's *ancien régime*. While some expected peace and stability to accompany such a restoration, others saw Napoleon's infringement on their freedoms as betrayal. Among the most disillusioned Frenchmen was General Malet, a man who was no stranger to disappointment.

His father, Jean de Malet, a minor noble, realized early that his family would never enjoy as much wealth as the higher nobility. Determined to gain recognition and glory instead, he did so through military endeavors. Over the course of his career, he rose steadily through the ranks, ultimately becoming regimental captain in the Beauvilliers Cavalry. At the age of sixty, he led his company to garrison in the Franche-Comté at Dôle. He decided to settle down in the picturesque and peaceful town and, despite his advanced years, took a young, well-off, bourgeois

woman, Gabrielle Fèvre, as his wife and finally began a family. Together, they produced two sons and a daughter, welcoming their first child, Claude-François, on 28 June 1754.

Wanting to pursue a military career like his father, this young man enlisted in the first company of the King's Musketeers on 26 December 1771. Due in large part to his noble status, he quickly gained admission to the Royal Household Troops, the elite though anachronistic Musketeers, in which each man immediately received an officer's ranking. Made a lieutenant, Malet served dutifully for four years until France's financial difficulties led to the dissolution of Louis XVI's personal entourage on 15 December 1775. He found himself, now at the age of 21, unemployed and forced to return to the modest estate of his parents in Dôle. Although other positions were available to him by virtue of his experience and rank, he had a bitter taste in his mouth and little interest in continuing to pursue his military career. Back home in the Franche-Comté, Malet found himself swept up in an increasingly raucous vortex of political debate.

Most members of the nobility and clergy intended to maintain the monarchy, but they did not desire, or approve of, the absolute monarchy established by Louis XIV. Although both groups hoped to regain some of the political and social influence they had lost during and since the Sun King's reign, there had yet to be any serious consideration of instituting a constitution—such as in England—to limit the king's power. The possibility of transitioning to a constitutional monarchy remained primarily a topic for discussion among “enlightened” philosophers. Rebellious against the monarchical loyalties inculcated in his youth, Malet became more and more interested in these proposals for building a liberal society and government—and made no effort to hide his preference. Adolphe Thiers, a historian before becoming one of the most influential political figures in France during the nineteenth century, attributes Malet's political ideology, however unusual for someone in his position in society, to his having read the writings

of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Thiers neglected to elaborate on this theory, simply explaining that many men of Malet's time read the *philosophe's* works, though few were so clearly affected.³⁹²

As innovative ideas began to take root in Malet's mind, he found himself in direct opposition to his father and younger brother, Claude-Joseph, who remained fervent Royalists like most of the nobles in the Franche-Comté and elsewhere. Nothing in Malet's upbringing explicitly destined him to be a proponent of liberal political beliefs or, ultimately, of Republicanism.³⁹³ Perhaps he saw hope in the new proposals, thinking that with such changes in place, the country would enjoy more stability, not being subject to the haphazard whims of royalty and the privileged classes.

Although the next thirteen years brought France increasingly massive debt and widespread famine in the countryside and led the unwitting nation toward revolution, Malet enjoyed a peaceful and uneventful life at his childhood home, pursuing aimless leisure-time activities. With time, his friends and family came to realize, through Malet's various schemes, that he was a more unusual person than they had imagined. In addition to his unique political views, his romantic decisions also drew criticism. Denise de Balay, the youngest daughter of Baron Charles-Maximilien-Joseph de Balay and Dame Antoinette-Suzanne de Fabri, had grown up on her parents' estate in Arbois, thirty-five miles from Dôle. During her teenage years, she fell in love with her older neighbor, Claude-François, and expressed to her parents the desire to

³⁹² Adolphe Thiers, *Histoire du Consulat et de l'Empire* (Paris: Paulin, 1845-1874), 14: 524.

³⁹³ Édouard Guillon mentions the fact that Malet was the only one in his immediate family to embrace the Revolution's ideas, but gives no theory as to why. Similarly, Albert Duruy insists that it is impossible to know the cause of the difference of political opinion for sure. Édouard Guillon, *Les Complots militaires sous le Consulat et l'Empire: d'après les documents inédits des Archives* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit & Co., 1894), 170. Albert Duruy, "La Conspiration du general Malet d'après des documents inédits," *Revue des deux mondes* 31 (January-June 1931): 633.

marry him. They vehemently refused, primarily on political grounds. Balay, a steadfast Monarchist, would never dream of allowing his daughter to marry such a flagrant liberal, regardless of his noble status. Resolute to the point of stubbornness and unconcerned with political dispositions, the young girl decided that if her parents could not respect her wishes, she would join the nearby Ursuline convent. Because she was only sixteen years old, her parents initially dismissed both requests as spontaneous whims, characteristic of children who do not yet know what they want from life. Ultimately, Denise headed to the convent, seemingly determined to disobey her parents' wishes in one way or another: either they would grant her permission to marry the man she wanted, or she would become a nun. News of Denise's decision reached Claude-François, who rushed to the nunnery where he found the young girl already covered in white veils. He ran to her side despite the sacrosanct ceremony in progress and asked for her hand in marriage. Having already taken initial vows, she insisted that he wait one year while she finished her novitiate training. As the year passed, Denise's parents came to accept the union, though they remained skeptical. On 9 January 1788, the seventeen-year-old Denise wedded the thirty-three-year old Malet.

A year and a half into their marriage, the newlyweds were swept along with the rest of the nation down the path of the French Revolution. In response to the fall of the Bastille on 14 July 1789 and to more generalized bursts of nationwide violence, groups of men gathered together forming militias, known as National Guards, to defend local property and to maintain order. With the creation of this new military came the need for experienced and qualified officers. Owing to his previous experience and rank as lieutenant, Malet soon found himself serving as battalion commander of his hometown's National Guard. Yet his fervent liberalism placed him in a precarious situation as the majority of the Franche-Comté remained Royalist.

News of the royal family's forced relocation to Paris led many Franche-Comté Monarchists to consider Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette prisoners in their own capital. Remaining ardent supporters of the monarchy, the troops under Malet's leadership wanted to march to the city and restore royal authority. Originally raised during the summer of 1789, the kingdom's National Guards now risked defying their initial purpose of maintaining order. Despite his liberal passions, Malet was willing to concede that France might not yet be ready for true Republicanism, seeing, in the meantime, a compromise in the conception of a constitutional monarchy.³⁹⁴ Reconciling himself to the idea that such a government, especially if led by a weak ruler like Louis XVI, could pave the way to a pure Republic, Malet latched onto his troops' demand to journey to Paris.³⁹⁵ An opportune moment for the men to act never presented itself, however, and the guardsmen remained in Dôle.

Malet's political ideology continually put him at odds with Royalist sympathizers, especially in his private life. His father went so far as to disown him, thereby hoping to scare his son into rejoining the monarchist cause. Not to be left out of the family endeavors, Malet's younger brother, Claude-Joseph, tried numerous times to buy his allegiance, offering him large amounts of money to abandon Republican ideals. Malet resolutely defended his political principles, refusing to sacrifice them for the sake of a more stable financial situation. He and Denise lived on his meager salary during the initial disorderly years of the Revolution. As he began to make a name for himself in the military, however, various opportunities and promotions brought more money to the couple, though they never became wealthy by any means. Malet's

³⁹⁴ Frédéric Masson, *La Vie et les conspirations du Général Malet, 1754-1812*, 3rd edition (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, 1920), 17.

³⁹⁵ Stéphane Claude Gigon, *Le Général Malet: d'après les documents inédits des Archives Nationales et des Archives de la Guerre avec un plan de Paris en 1812 pour l'intelligence de la deuxième conspiration* (Paris: Henri Charles-Lavauzelle, 1913), 8-9.

reputation as a brilliant, and even more important, liberal-minded military commander allowed him to cultivate numerous relationships among Paris's Revolutionary elite during his sojourns there.

Among his comrades were the Lameth brothers, Counts Charles and Alexandre, who, having served across the Atlantic for several years during the American Revolution, were eager to participate in their own country's transformation. Alexandre briefly served as President of the National Assembly in fall 1790. Despite membership in the Jacobin club, Alexandre came to believe that this group of radical reformers was moving too far too fast and began seeking to reconcile himself with the royal court, a sentiment which continued to intensify over the following months. He lashed out at the Jacobin party, especially Maximilien Robespierre, for its platform of inciting violence and insubordination throughout the country. Charles became President of the National Assembly less than a year later, serving briefly during the chaotic time immediately following Louis XVI's failed attempt to flee France on 20 June 1791. Using his power as head of the Assembly, he spoke passionately about the possibility of maintaining the constitutional monarchy in France. Given Louis' recent attempt to flee, Charles acknowledged the difficulties his proposal would entail but insisted that the attempt was necessary for the overall good of the nation.

Playing on the mutual desire to see a constitution established for France, Malet carefully cultivated his relationship with the Lameth brothers, using their military and political connections to enhance his own standing. On 30 June 1791, Alexandre suggested him for a position as his aide-de-camp and also for promotion to the rank of captain. Within a month, Malet received the position, though nothing came of the recommendation for captain. Later, in December 1791, Adjutant General Victor, Prince de Broglie, personally requested Malet's

transfer to his command. Broglie soon led his troops through Strasbourg, where a significant Republican society had formed with the blessing of the town's mayor. The group drew to it a number of well-known political figures, including Malet's cousin and author of *La Marseillaise*, Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle. Malet's numerous connections within the government and military hierarchy may have afforded him some benefits, but they were unable to provide a smooth route for his career to follow.

Only after a second recommendation for captain by Alexandre de Lameth, accompanied by support from Prince de Broglie, did Malet receive his long-sought promotion. On 25 March 1792, he saw himself appointed to captain. The promotion came just in time for Malet to prove himself: France declared war on Austria less than a month later. Malet constantly sent letters to his wife, each increasingly excited about the events underway. Not a single situation confounded him. He had an answer for every question and a plan for handling every scenario.³⁹⁶ Either he never shared his insights with his superiors, or they simply never listened.

With his military career advancing, Malet's fortune seemed to continue into political affairs. Although he had been willing to accept a constitutional monarchy as an educational tool on the road toward a Republic, its abolition had always been his ultimate desire. The official declaration of France as a Republic on 21 September 1792, he believed, would end the political discord and hostility afflicting the country, but not many were as pleased or as optimistic, including several of his personal connections.

Refusing to accept the Legislative Assembly's pronouncement of the nation's Republican status, Victor de Broglie tendered his resignation from the military. His successor, General Alexandre de Beauharnais, provided Malet yet another useful political connection. The general

³⁹⁶ Louis Garros, *Le Général Malet: Conspirateur* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1936), 23.

was a powerful member of the Jacobin party and was especially active in Strasbourg. As his aide-de-camp, Malet had a firsthand view into this world, strengthening his already fervent Republican opinions. His rapport with the general helped not only to intensify his political sentiments but also to further his military career. After seven months of working under Beauharnais, he received two promotions nearly back to back, a welcome change from the difficulties he had experienced during his quest to become captain: elevation to head of brigade (major) on 16 March 1793 and then to colonel only two months later. Despite the prosperous and fluid military career that finally seemed to be in the making, Malet's past would soon come to haunt him.

A decree issued on 21 September 1793 removed all former members of the Royal Household Troops from active duty in France's military. Preparing for his trip back to Dôle, he received numerous letters lauding his abilities and dedication to the Revolutionary cause. Despite the praise as a loyal Republican and capable commander, the Committee of Public Safety's decree swept Malet out of the military for the second time in his career. Less than five months after his return to his hometown, the very people dismissed from the military due to their previous service for the monarchy became the ones the government specifically invited to reenlist. Malet did so, reporting to Neustadt on 8 January 1794. Only five months later, the need for troops to face foreign invaders lessened, and the French military found itself with a top-heavy hierarchy. Yet again, Malet's reputation could not save him from another career interruption. In June 1795, he faced, for a third time, dismissal from the military with only letters of fulsome praise to show for his service. Despite the lack of employment, Malet remained in Paris this time rather than return to Dôle as he had in the past.

On 13 Vendémiaire IV (5 October 1795), right-wing opponents of the upcoming new government, the Directory, backed by thousands of National Guardsmen, squared off against the regime, intending to ensure that the former Convention members did not establish a chokehold on the new governing body. Quickly massing together a defensive force, the Convention freed roughly 1,500 working-class prisoners to serve as protection. Although he was not actively serving in the military, Malet volunteered to help coordinate the defense of the assembly's gathering place. The unruly and rebellious group approached the palace, outnumbering its defenders 25,000 to 6,000. Despite their strength of numbers, many of the rebels were unprepared for battle, expecting little or no resistance from the much smaller force. Having the advantage of tried and true leadership from various volunteer officials, however, the defenders quashed the rebellion.³⁹⁷

Although delighted to have participated in the defense of the Convention, and thus having furthered the Republican cause, Malet had also acted out of purely personal motivations. He had anticipated that the successful suppression of the insurrection on 13 Vendémiaire would allow him to gain readmission to the military. As soon as the event had ended, he approached General Henri Clarke about the possibility. With the general's backing, the army welcomed Malet back on 14 April 1796, placing him at Besançon.³⁹⁸ Another outcome of the victory over the rebels Malet had no way of knowing at the time. The very event in which he was so proud of having participated served not only his own purposes but also those of an up-and-coming military genius, the man who would soon become his arch-nemesis: Napoleon Bonaparte.

³⁹⁷ Malet was on hand at the uprising, despite his present unemployment. Whether he actively participated in the fighting and what his role may have been is unclear. Men previously dismissed from the military for various reasons received warm welcomes back to service after aiding in the victory of the Convention. Garros, *Le Général Malet*, 25-26.

³⁹⁸ Garros, *Le Général Malet*, 26

Malet enjoyed a period of uninterrupted military duty, seeing battle in Piedmont (Italy) as France expanded its borders. His loyal and competent service earned him promotion to brigadier general almost three years to the day of his reinstatement in the army. Contentedly serving a Republican government, he was at the high point of his life. On 15 August 1799, however, France's Army of Italy suffered defeat at the Battle of Novi, prompting a thorough reorganization. Malet bore no responsibility for Novi, but he found himself pushed from the forefront, sent back to garrison duty in the Franche-Comté. Although several uneventful months passed with little to no action in his assigned area, the nation was heading toward another turn. Yet another new regime took hold on 18 Brumaire VIII (9 November 1799).

While Malet did not necessarily oppose the overthrow of the Directorial government—many Frenchmen had recognized it as a poorly organized and ineffective regime from its outset—he did not approve of the immediate efforts of Napoleon to consolidate political power in himself. Ever the political activist, Malet recognized in the Constitution of the Year VIII a step away from the true Republic for which he longed. He developed an intense hatred of the nation's new leader, which was compounded with every new decision the First Consul made.

To keep his officers from gaining too much influence and thereby threatening his regime, Napoleon made it a point to prevent them from serving in regions where they had a history. Stationed for two years in Besançon, less than thirty-five miles northeast of Dôle, Malet had enjoyed the close proximity to his hometown. When news of his reassignment reached him, Malet considered the move a personal attack, though it had been, in fact, nothing more than a matter of policy to the First Consul. On 9 August 1801, Malet received the order to relocate to the 9th territorial division in Montpellier, nearly 345 miles away, near the Mediterranean coast of France. As soon as Malet arrived at this new post, Bonaparte moved him again, this time to

Bordeaux in the southwest with the 11th division. Both the distance from home, roughly 455 miles, and the cost of relocating twice greatly annoyed Malet. From this point on, his fellow officers and friends began describing him as a completely different person, cold, bitter, and openly hostile.

Even when his political opinions put him at odds with the regime in power, Malet had served loyally regardless of whose orders he received. After his move to Bordeaux, he seemed to go out of his way to find, or make, trouble. His fierce Republicanism put him into constant conflict with the town's officials and sundered within eight months any of his helpful ties in the city. Although his Republican ideals included denunciation of the privileges and elevated status enjoyed by the nobility prior to 1789, he acted as if he were an exception. Whether he expected people to honor his requests—or more accurately, his demands—because of his noble birth or simply because of his current military status is unclear. Regardless of the specific cause, Malet's apparent expectation that his desires be satisfied without question infringed upon the idea of equality introduced by the Revolution which he so passionately claimed to follow.³⁹⁹ The constant hostilities prompted Malet to insist upon a transfer. On 24 April 1802, he reported to a new post in nearby Périgueux. Not yet satisfied with his location, he immediately demanded, and received, a two-month leave of absence at full pay.

The sham of a Republic run by Napoleon did not fool everyone. Malet saw France returning to past oppression as citizens voted away the gains of the Revolution by placing all

³⁹⁹ Malet was not alone in advocating a type of unequal equality. In 1795, Antoine Boissy d'Anglas presented the Constitution of the Year III to the Convention, explaining in his introduction that citizens with a personal interest in maintaining order and stability must lead France. He argued that “with very few exceptions, you will find such men only among those who own some property.” Christopher Hibbert, *Days of the French Revolution* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 282.

political authority in the hands of one man. Upon the establishment of Bonaparte as Consul for Life, Malet immediately swore a vehement hatred of the leader, a sentiment that proved lifelong.⁴⁰⁰ Initially, he took no direct action against the government and instead wrapped himself in his career, serving faithfully and admirably. Stationed far from any especially Republican crowds, Malet tired of the Napoleonic acolytes surrounding him. He demanded transfer to Angoulême, a city more overtly Republican. Upon arrival, he began meeting and commiserating with local Republicans. Opting to avoid violent forms of protest, Malet simply sent letters to various officials revealing his frustrations. He sent one such report, for example, to Minister of War Louis-Alexandre Berthier on 19 Fructidor XI (6 September 1803) denouncing *émigrés* and expressing his disgust with several ministers.⁴⁰¹ Eventually increasing the gravity of his actions, he refused to allow his men to serve at a number of political functions within the city. No truly disciplinary repercussions followed these spiteful acts because he coupled them with letters sent directly to Napoleon reminding the First Consul of the invaluable services he had performed in his name. Expecting his respectable—though not flawless—military career to counteract any minor disturbances he created, Malet feared no punitive action.

Despite the general's disobedience, Prefect of Charente Félix Bonnaire had no objection to Malet's maintaining his position in the military, but preferred that he do it somewhere else. Demanding the troublemaker's transfer to the Vendée, Bonnaire wrote that "the most important thing for this region is that he has a change of residence."⁴⁰² Although never reaching the point

⁴⁰⁰ Comte de Lort de Sérignan, *Un conspirateur militaire sous le premier empire: Le Général Malet* (Paris: Payot, 1925), 22.

⁴⁰¹ Masson, *La Vie et les conspirations*, 55.

⁴⁰² Masson, *La Vie et les conspirations*, 58.

of violence, Malet's increasingly mischievous behavior had earned him the label of political malcontent.

Having granted Malet's requests for relocation and frequent paid leave, his superior officers had hoped to suspend his defiance. When this failed, Napoleon decided to try a new approach. On 12 December 1803, in a blatant effort to purchase Malet's devotion to the Consulate, the newly created Legion of Honor welcomed him with the rank of Commander. He promptly responded in a letter humbly acknowledging the distinction and declaring his unshakable "love of country and liberty."⁴⁰³

Given his admission to the Legion of Honor and the lack of disciplinary actions in response to his insubordination, Malet seems to have expected that a certain level of camaraderie existed between himself and Napoleon. After the leader's coronation as Emperor on 2 December 1804, Malet wrote a short letter implying warm feelings. He did, however, try to convince the Emperor to avoid a tyrannical reign, beseeching him not to turn his back on the people who had granted this new station: "use all the power that your magisterial title grants you to ensure that this new form of government functions to save the nation from the incapacity or tyranny of your successors, and that, having ceded to you some of our precious liberty, we will not one day be reproached by our children for having ceded theirs."⁴⁰⁴ While the tone of the letter was surprisingly positive and hopeful, Malet had in no way turned from his Republican principles. His passive resistance and insubordinate behavior in Angoulême had brought him unfavorable attention several years ago. Surely, he did not actually expect Napoleon to heed his advice on how to run the nation.

⁴⁰³ Saint-Hilaire, *Histoire des conspirations*, 332.

⁴⁰⁴ Saint-Hilaire, *Histoire des conspirations*, 333.

After the imperial coronation, Malet's campaign of libel against local officials intensified, as he wrote more and more letters denouncing simple civil servants and senators. By the end of 1805, he was serving with the Army of Italy in Rome. Even out of the country his attitude did not change and so drew him into incessant conflict with superior officers and government officials. Tired of dealing with the complaints about Malet, Minister of War Alexandre Berthier took decisive steps. Not trusting insubordination to be a sufficient charge to dismiss him from military service—after all, Malet had not yet been punished for it—Berthier concocted additional allegations. He charged Malet with showing favoritism to French soldiers after a profitable confiscation of goods, thereby creating hostility and insurrection among the accompanying Roman militia. The indictment was serious enough that a board of inquiry immediately summoned Malet to Paris to answer for his conduct.

Malet and Denise moved to the capital city on 15 July 1807, taking up residency at n° 75, rue des Saints-Pères. During the investigation, which lasted nearly a year, he continued to receive the same salary as when on active duty. Aside from the humiliation of having his life scrutinized for transgressions he had not committed, the time passed as nothing more than a paid vacation. With the exception of periodically appearing before the board's judges to defend himself, Malet had nothing to do. Taking advantage of his free time, he fell in with an underground group of liberal activists. The club comprised mostly well-off members of society, including doctors and high-ranking military and political officials. Upon Malet's admission to the group, he learned of a plot formulated by General Joseph Servan de Gerbey, briefly minister of war in 1792, to overthrow Napoleon's regime.

Servan proposed replacing the imperial regime with a provisional government, though he planned to work out its specific details only as the need arose. If once in power the new regime

found itself unable to continue, it would extend an invitation to the Bourbon family, offering to allow their return to the monarchy. Servan was not willing, however, to sacrifice the gains achieved by the French Revolution. The Bourbons would only be welcome under the conditions of the Constitution of 1791—real authority resting in a unicameral legislature, with the king maintaining solely the right to postpone legislation—with some modifications.⁴⁰⁵

Before he could risk putting his plan into motion, Servan needed to ensure that the plot had the support of key figures within the city. He won several senators to his cause by promising them positions in the provisional government which would replace the imperial setup they despised. They had lacked any true political power since Bonaparte's takeover on 18 Brumaire: he had simply kept the Senate around to ensure that his regime continued to appear Republican, at least on the surface. Should Servan succeed in reinstating the Constitution of 1791, the senators would enjoy more authority than they currently possessed. Even more important than the senators' support was the allegiance of Minister of Police Joseph Fouché. Given his passivity on 18 Brumaire, Servan expected gaining his backing to be an easy task.

Fouché was the type of man who served whoever or whatever regime happened to be in power at the time, looking out only for himself. His position in the government made him privy to limitless information about criminals, general malcontents, and political dissidents. His men constantly reported news of subversive endeavors in the making. Some they thwarted in infancy, some they fabricated to justify the arrest of otherwise innocent citizens, and some they simply let happen. Fouché had no intention of interfering in Servan's plan, should he manage to get it off the ground. As in the past, he was content to serve the victor of the situation. Should Servan's

⁴⁰⁵ Exactly what constitutional revisions Servan wanted to incorporate if France returned to a monarchy are unknown. Given his desire to overthrow a government led by one man, it seems doubtful that he would want to increase the king's power.

plan succeed, Fouché would offer his services to the new regime. Should it fail, he would devotedly perform the duties of his office and arrest the conspirators. He seemed to have no true loyalty. In fact, he once stated, “I don’t care for any particular form of government over another. All that means nothing.”⁴⁰⁶

Early in 1807, Servan and his cohorts believed their chance to act against the imperial regime had come. Knowing more accurate details of the horrific outcome of the Battle of Eylau on 7-8 February than the general public, they expected Parisians to welcome a change in regime, or to be indifferent to it at the very least. They began considering how the provisional government they intended to create would function. They discussed how the regime would work, who would have what positions, and how they would handle various hypothetical scenarios. By the time they managed to work the details out to everyone’s liking, the opportune moment to act had passed. News of Napoleon’s decisive victory at the Battle of Friedland on 14 June 1807 had nullified any ill-will the Parisians may have harbored toward him. If Servan tried to put his plan into action with the city’s faith in the Emperor reinforced, he would have no chance of success. Discouraged, he assured his followers that another opportunity would arise. Although he was right, he would not live long enough to make use of it.

Servan died in Paris on 10 May 1808 at the age of sixty-seven. To some in his covert group, the hopes of overthrowing Napoleon’s regime passed along with him. Others saw their aspirations continuing in Malet. Thirteen men, each as eccentric as their new leader, initially united with the general in his attempt to overthrow Napoleon’s empire. Several of them, sharing Malet’s political proclivities, had held positions in France’s previous Republican governments. Pierre-Alexandre Lemare, former president of the administrative commission in the Jura, found

⁴⁰⁶ Jean Savant, *Les Ministres de Napoléon* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1959), 210

himself swept out of office on 18 Brumaire, instantly instilling in him a deep hatred of the nation's newest leader. Antoine-François Ève, called Demaillot, and Blanchet represented Robespierre's Jacobin club, while Jean-François Ricord, a lawyer and poet, had served in the Convention. Other politically minded men, Gariot, Rigomer Bazin and Liébaud, previously held positions in various local governments and administrations but lacked strong ties to any specific Revolutionary regime. Providing the group with some of their most important connections was former legislator Florent-Guyot, who had a good rapport with a number of Senators. The plot drew men from not only political spheres, but other careers as well. Baude, an ex-commissioner of police, and Malet's own former aide-de-camp, Jacob Poilpré, supported the general's conspiratorial efforts. Another schemer was Philippe Corneille, a "gentle dreamer [who was] hardly dangerous."⁴⁰⁷ He had previously served in the Royal Army but preferred spending his time writing both poetry and prose. The group's final two members came from the medical profession, Doctors Gindre and Saiffert.⁴⁰⁸ Once assembled, the eclectic dissidents began meeting on the rue Bourg-l'Abbé in the 3e arrondissement to plot the Emperor's downfall.

Although the basis of his plot was similar to that of Servan's, Malet intended to amend the plan's ultimate goal. After all, Malet risked the harshest punishment if it failed. He could not bear the thought of leaving his wife and son without provision or subject himself to imprisonment or execution for a plan with which he was not completely satisfied. Servan had been content with returning the Bourbons to the throne under a constitutional monarchy, but Malet had another idea. Rather than reinstating any previous constitution, he proposed a new regime which he would call—dangerously enough—the Dictatorship.

⁴⁰⁷ Garros, *Le Général Malet*, 72.

⁴⁰⁸ The source material does not provide first names for Blanchet, Gariot, Liébaud, Florent-Guyot, Or Doctors Gindre and Saiffert.

In spring 1808, Bonaparte turned his military focus to Spain, intending to depose Charles IV and to install his own elder brother, Joseph, on the throne. He set out with his troops from Paris on 2 April, heading to Bayonne, nearly 480 miles southwest, near the Spanish border. Despite being closer to the capital than during some previous campaigns, the Emperor's attempts at communication were no easier—there were no semaphore stations established toward the Pyrenees, and if Paris needed to get word to its leader, or vice versa, the only option was courier. The time required by such communication worked perfectly for Malet's plot. Once Napoleon arrived in Bayonne, he could hope for no faster communication with his capital than two days in each direction.

Four days was more than plenty to institute his plan, Malet believed. After all, the plot was no more elaborate than the one that had brought Napoleon to power on 18 Brumaire. His fellow conspirators agreed, and they launched phase two. Philippe Corneille assumed that his writing experience would allow him to create believable political documents which would prove the legality of the Dictatorship. Although the idea seemed good at the time, the assumption was wrong. He ultimately proved entirely inept.

The first document, considered a necessity by all of the conspirators, was a forged *senatus-consulte* declaring Napoleon an outlaw and announcing the framework for a new government. The Dictatorship would consist of nine men, Malet included, and would have the task of ruling France while also drafting a new constitution on which the people would vote after its completion.⁴⁰⁹ Bazin and Corneille, charged with the task of creating the faux Senatorial

⁴⁰⁹ Of the fourteen conspirators involved in the plot, only four would serve in the Dictatorship if it came to fruition: Malet, Lemare, Bazin, and Florent-Guyot. The government's other five members would be General Jean Victor Marie Moreau, Admiral Truguet, and Senators Destutt-Tracy, Garat, and Lambrechts. Masson, *La Vie et les conspirations*, 99.

decree, ultimately produced a mediocre and problematic text. They faced three decisions, muddling them all. First, the name chosen for the proposed government was a problem. Bazin and Corneille understood that using the word “dictatorship” in their *senatus-consulte* would alarm the printer, who might alert authorities. Wanting to avoid use of the term, they opted to have it spelled “diotatorship.”⁴¹⁰ Once they had the copies in hand, they planned to erase the connection in the “o,” making it resemble a “c.” Second, they dated the document 20 April 1808, though Malet did not intend to execute the plot until late May. If anyone asked about the discrepancy, they planned to explain that the Senate had debated the idea of ending Napoleon’s regime in secret, publishing the document but choosing not to circulate it until later. Third, rather than concluding with a list of approving Senators’ names, they simply left “Signatures to Follow,” thereby casting doubt on the authenticity of the *senatus-consulte*, the very document intended to legitimize the Dictatorship.⁴¹¹

In addition to the senatorial decree, Bazin and Corneille produced three more proclamations to implement should they succeed in overthrowing the imperial regime. One, simply titled “Decree of 29 May 1808,” outlined the Dictatorship’s initial twelve orders of business. The two opening articles addressed the military, announcing the immediate withdrawal of French troops from foreign lands, the abolition of conscription, and an amnesty for anyone who had dodged the draft or deserted his post. Malet and his conspirators considered recalling French forces a necessary step to ensure lasting peace under the supervision of the new government. Previous regimes had come and gone, all the time struggling with the challenge of either maintaining war or finding a way to end hostilities on satisfactory grounds. Malet

⁴¹⁰ Garros, *Le Général Malet*, 78.

⁴¹¹ Masson, *La Viet et les conspirations*, 100.

expected the withdrawal of troops to appease not only France's European opponents but also French citizens, helping to ensure their loyalty to the Dictatorship and the government that would eventually take its place. The article promising both an end to obligatory military service and a general reprieve for those who had eluded it served a similar purpose. Several other clauses declared the abolition of the death penalty except, ironically, for cases of rebellion, and extended an official pardon to anyone exiled, imprisoned, or executed for political beliefs. A final stipulation placed the nation's military under Malet's control.⁴¹²

If the Dictatorship came to fruition, the general's new position would bring with it the responsibility for providing Parisian troops with their daily commands. Malet's first decree, dated 30 May 1808, would reorder the organization of current officers, ensuring that the men holding those positions were loyal to him. He declared that commands from anyone not specified in that group or in future "Orders of the Day" null and void and also banned the wearing of any imperial decorations, including the ones bestowed upon members of the Legion of Honor. Troops with such commendations would receive medals deemed appropriate by the Dictatorship at a future date, assuming the regime proved lasting.⁴¹³

The publication of the *senatus-consulte* and the two subsequent decrees would only inform government and military officials currently stationed in Paris about the demise of Napoleon's empire. To spread the word among the general public and French troops abroad, Malet ordered the printing of 12,000 proclamations titled "Dictatorship," remarkable considering the group's simultaneous effort to avoid using that very term. The document assumed that French citizens had tired of warfare and longed to regain the fullness of the liberties they had

⁴¹² Masson, *La Vie et les conspirations*, 102.

⁴¹³ Masson, *La Vie et les conspirations*, 103.

won during the French Revolution. Should his plot succeed, Malet wanted to take an early opportunity to assure Frenchmen that tyranny would not pervade the new government as it had with Napoleon's rise to power. The final paragraph of the first section promised that the members of the Dictatorship had only France's best interest in mind: "Citizens and soldiers, in attacking tyranny, we took pride in aspiring to true glory, that of creating in France a liberal administration. This result obtained, we will immediately rejoin your ranks. The blessings of happy citizens are the only goal of our ambition, the sole treasure with which we want to enrich ourselves."⁴¹⁴ To the soldiers, Malet wrote that they had not been "Bonaparte's troops," that such possession was impossible.⁴¹⁵ They owed the Emperor nothing, for their only true loyalty had to lie with France and the wishes of her people. The general promised that his provisional government would be careful to uphold the liberties of the French people. That is, if he and his co-conspirators were successful.

While some of the group's ideas may seem eccentric, none was more so than a suggestion made by Lemare concerning their weapon of choice. To avoid drawing attention by purchasing weapons, several of the plotters offered the use of guns already in their possession. Lemare argued in favor of something quieter, something more befitting the situation. A dagger, he explained "is the proper weapon of conspirators, a clever choice that can serve two purposes. If need be we can use it against ourselves to prevent being taken alive by the hands of the tyrant or his devotees."⁴¹⁶ The group accepted the proposal, putting him in charge of acquiring enough knives to arm not only themselves but also those they expected to draw to their cause along the way. Now the question became how to obtain the desired 1,200 daggers without raising

⁴¹⁴ Masson, *La Vie et les conspirations*, 106.

⁴¹⁵ *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 1, document 137.

⁴¹⁶ Masson, *La Vie et les conspirations*, 109-110.

suspicious. Wandering through Paris, Lemare purchased the handles from one shop and the blades from another. With weapons acquired, the conspirators turned their attention to last minute details.

Four days before the date set for the overthrow, the group decided to confide in Generals Pierre Guillet and Guillaume for additional help while the plot unfolded.⁴¹⁷ After Malet read aloud the false *senatus-consulte*, Guillaume asked question after question about nearly every aspect of the plan. The level of anxiety among the original conspirators increased with each additional inquiry. Perhaps his questions arose from genuine curiosity and interest, or perhaps they portended a disastrous ending. As the group adjourned for the night, Malet suddenly declared that Minister of Police Fouché had somehow learned of their plan and that, to ensure their safety, they should postpone taking any action. Although Fouché had, in fact, heard rumors of a Republican plot circulating for several weeks, it is unlikely that Malet knew. He intended his exclamation to startle the two newcomers into not participating, at which point the original conspirators could reschedule their plans.

As the baffled men headed home from the meeting, Guillaume and Demaillet discussed the night's events, each growing increasingly hostile toward the other. Finally, Demaillet could take no more and launched into a screaming fit, blaming Guillaume for the plan's sudden reversal. Unfortunately for the two, the shouting match took place just outside of the Palais-Royal where General Lemoyne happened to be within earshot. Seeking readmission to active duty—the military had forced him to retire against his will in 1794 at the age of fifty-three—he saw his opportunity, knowing that his assistance in thwarting a conspiracy would not go unrewarded. He immediately made his way to Dubois' Prefecture of police, in the 4e

⁴¹⁷ No first names are provided in the source material for Guillet or Guillaume.

arrondissement, to report what he had heard: that Guillaume and Demaillot were busy plotting against the imperial regime. Although the information was inaccurate, Prefect Dubois acted quickly, unlike his counterpart Fouché, who had long known that a conspiracy was brewing but had done nothing—perhaps waiting for more details, but more likely, as in the past, never having any intention of interfering. Within a week, Dubois ordered the arrest of the two alleged schemers.

Despite remaining silent in accordance with Malet's final words at the last meeting, the conspirators were about to face trouble. On the morning of 8 June 1808, Demaillot and Guillaume each woke to a knock on his door. Greeting them were several of Dubois' men waiting to take them into custody. After escorting them to separate interrogation rooms at the Prefecture, Inspector Pierre Huges Veyrat, one of Dubois' best men, grilled them about the details of the conspiracy. The meeting was not the first for Demaillot and the inspector. Prior to joining the police, Veyrat had made a living counterfeiting, a way of life cut short when Demaillot testified against him. Facing charges of his own this time, Demaillot remained silent during questioning. Guillaume, on the other hand, almost immediately crumpled under the pressure. During his first round of interrogation, he rambled on and on, implicating the other prisoner as the mastermind behind the conspiracy but only hinting at Malet's involvement. Having attended only one of the plotters' meetings, he knew little of the actual plan. Not satisfied with the information they had obtained thus far and making no progress with Demaillot, the police questioned Guillaume again later that same day. This time he denounced every person whose name he could remember, though it was hardly a complete list: Corneille, Guillet, and Gariot. With this information, Dubois and his men began searching for the rest of the plotters.

As soon as he learned of the arrests, Malet fled his home to seek safety elsewhere. After spending the night at the Hôtel d’Orient in the 7^e arrondissement, he rushed to his next hideout—clearly an illogical choice—the house of fellow conspirator Poilpré. Wanting to let Denise know that her husband was safe, Poilpré headed to her home, though his friendly deed severely compromised his own security, not to mention that of Malet. Dubois’s police, knowing the former soldier’s connection to Malet, waited for him outside the general’s residence and took him into custody when he arrived. His arrest quickly led to that of Malet. Not at all denying involvement in the conspiracy, the general, even before the interrogation began, divulged every detail of the plot that the police could possibly have wanted, though he added his own twist. Rather than admit that he was the author of the plot, he denounced Florent-Guyot and Jacquemont as the ringleaders.⁴¹⁸ No longer confident that he would receive leniency from Bonaparte, he sought to hide behind the names of two of his cohorts. By mid-July, Dubois’s men had arrested each conspirator.⁴¹⁹ Napoleon’s regime seemed safe.

When Napoleon received Dubois’s first account of the thwarted takeover, he replied calmly that he wanted the “shady business” stopped quickly and quietly.⁴²⁰ In each of his subsequent reports, the prefect passionately insisted that the men under arrest posed a real threat

⁴¹⁸ Sources only mention Jacquemont in this particular instance, giving no information about him except that he had a political background of some variety. In fact, even Napoleon himself commented, “I have never heard of him.” Garros, *Le Général Malet*, 87.

⁴¹⁹ Louis Garros lists the dates on which Dubois and his men arrested each man. He also includes the names of other people taken into custody, presumably guilty of having had some tie to one or more of the conspirators, though he gives no details. Of the sixteen conspirators—including Guillet and Guillaume—only Lemare managed to escape the Prefect’s police, fleeing to Montpellier where he became a surgeon using the alias Jacquet. The prefect and his men arrested the conspirators as follows: 8 June, Demaillet and Guillaume; 9 June, Corneille, Guillet, Gariot, Malet, and Poilpré; 12 June, Florent-Guyot; 23 June, Bazin and Ricord; 24 June, Liébaud and Baudé; 4 July, Saiffert; 7 July, Blanchet; 14 July, Gindre. Garros, *Le Général Malet*, 84-86. Masson, *La Vie et les conspirations*, 119.

⁴²⁰ Garros, *Le Général Malet*, 86.

to the Empire. He portrayed them as serious insurgents who would stop at nothing to destroy the imperial regime as long as they freely roamed the nation. In his own daily reports to the Emperor, however, Minister of Police Fouché consistently downplayed the danger of the conspiracy, referring to the interrogations still underway as “conversations without real value.”⁴²¹ In response to Fouché, Napoleon explained that he knew of at least one earlier conspiracy in which Malet, the “wicked subject [and] cowardly thief,” had involved himself.⁴²² Although not convinced that the conspirators posed as serious a threat as Dubois depicted, Napoleon eventually wrote to Fouché telling him that he did not expect, nor approve of, the discrepancies between the two men’s accounts.⁴²³ Growing angry at the determination of the minister of police to disregard the seriousness of the situation, Napoleon wrote to Arch-Chancellor Jean-Jacques Régis de Cambacérès on 17 July, “Fouché is spoiled, favoring crackpots whom he hopes to use to his own advantage and wanting nothing more than to discourage those people who anticipate deadly and extraordinary events.”⁴²⁴ Although annoyed at him, the Emperor knew of no other man as qualified to lead the Ministry of Police as Fouché and ultimately took no punitive measures against him. While he recognized Fouché as an extremely talented official, he saw no such value in General Malet. The Emperor’s wrath fell upon Malet and his co-conspirators, and by mid-July they found themselves prisoners of state incarcerated in Paris at La Force prison in the 4e arrondissement.

⁴²¹ Garros, *Le Général Malet*, 88.

⁴²² Presumably the conspiracy Napoleon was referring to was that of Servan, though it never came to fruition. Garros, *Le Général Malet*, 86.

⁴²³ Napoleon intended the two police forces to work independently of each other, essentially doubling surveillance. Some sources argue, however, that the Prefecture of Police was simply “an instrument of the Ministry of Police” and that Dubois was “in the hands of Fouché.” R. de Montreux, “La Police à Travers le Siècle,” *Le Gaulois du Dimanche: Supplément Hebdomadaire Littéraire et Illustré*, 7/8 November 1903.

⁴²⁴ Garros, *Le Général Malet*, 90.

Imprisonment only heightened Malet's hatred of Napoleon and his regime. Similarly, his stunt in June 1808 had increased, at least temporarily, the Emperor's interest in him. Napoleon had his police keep him up to date on the malcontent's actions, wanting to know who his visitors were and to whom he spoke within the prison. Writing himself to Napoleon on 23 October 1808, Malet sought to justify the plot he had hatched over the spring. His actions, he argued, stemmed from a true desire to protect the long-term prosperity of France, something the current imperial regime endangered. "What will happen to us if we lose our Emperor?" he asked.⁴²⁵ As long as Napoleon continued to insist upon being at the head of his troops amid the perils of war, his government was tragically fragile. The Emperor had no obvious reaction to Malet's explanation, but surely he recognized the validity of the general's argument. Whereas he had pardoned, and subsequently used to his own advantage, numerous plotters and dissidents in the past, he believed that the services Malet could offer were not worth any more effort.⁴²⁶ Bribery would not work on the general, as Napoleon had discovered upon admitting him to the Legion of Honor. The only chance of preventing future conspiracies by the dissatisfied Malet was to lock him in prison indefinitely. Or so the Emperor thought.

Prison was not enough to quell Malet's insubordination. On 29 June 1809, a *Te Deum* celebrating the capture of Vienna took place in Notre Dame. At La Force, just under a mile from the cathedral, the general was aware of the event and knew that all important officials would be in attendance. Although his means remain unknown, Malet managed to escape from his cell and made his way toward Notre Dame, where he hid among the crowd. After the ceremony, the troops were the first to leave. As they filed out, leaving the majority of politicians and high-

⁴²⁵ Masson, *La Vie et les conspirations*, 155.

⁴²⁶ Masson, *La Vie et les conspirations*, 157.

ranking military officers inside, he slammed the main doors, momentarily trapping them. Climbing to the highest point possible outside the building, he began shouting to the soldiers: “Bonaparte is dead! Down with Corsicans! Down with the police! Long live liberty!”⁴²⁷ Following his already ludicrous claims, he announced an end to the Empire and the creation of a Republic. He rattled off a list of names and their new positions within the government. His outburst was a fast-paced version of the plot which had led to his arrest the previous year. The outcome was only slightly different this time. He faced not only recapture but also the hysterical laughter of his fellow soldiers.

Rather than return him to La Force, which was obviously not managed strictly enough to hold him, the police sent him to the prison of Saint-Pélagie in the 5e arrondissement. Only a month after his arrival there, he began sending a constant barrage of correspondence to various officials, including Napoleon himself, about the possibility of his release. In July 1810, Malet addressed the Emperor and the minister of police in two letters sent within a few days of each other, declaring his innocence and his respect for the nation’s leader. To Minister Savary, he explained two reasons why he deserved his freedom. First, he cited the “zeal and devotion” with which he had performed his military duties, even under Napoleon.⁴²⁸ Second, he reminded Savary of their shared “esteem and friendship” for a general with whom they served in the Army of the Rhine.⁴²⁹ To Napoleon, Malet explained that he wrote his missive “to clarify to your majesty my innocence.”⁴³⁰ His letter makes it clear that Malet did not find his efforts to

⁴²⁷ Max Billard, *La Conspiration de Malet: Un interrègne de quelques heures, la nuit du 23 octobre 1812* (Paris: Perrin & Co., 1907), 15.

⁴²⁸ *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 2, document 236.

⁴²⁹ The letter does not name the general for whom Malet and the Minister shared affection. *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 2, document 236.

⁴³⁰ *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 2, document 237.

undermine and overthrow the imperial government worthy of detention. “I am still detained like a criminal,” he informed the Emperor.⁴³¹ In an attempt to assert one’s innocence, it seems logical to include information about why one was, in fact, not guilty. Malet did not adopt this approach in any of his letters. Instead, he constantly referred his recipients to his military service record, going so far as to include a detailed list of all his positions, deployments, and accomplishments with one of his letters to the Emperor.⁴³² While the inclusion of such a list appears disrespectful and condescending, Malet heightened both by reprimanding Napoleon for the treatment he had received since 1808: “I will succumb under the weight of misery, if your majesty persists in the goal of depriving me of the treatment due given my lengthy services.”⁴³³

The silence that met his supplications did not deter his letter writing. In August, he penned two letters, separated by only a week, to the minister of police. In his first correspondence on 10 August, Malet described his hopes—and expectations—of receiving his freedom once Savary discussed his predicament with the Emperor. He wanted him to remind Napoleon of his “given services, [and] those that I will give to him again.”⁴³⁴ Believing a week sufficient time in which to receive a response, Malet wrote again to Savary on 18 August. In his latest letter, rather than plead for release, he inquired about the possibility of a transfer to the rest home of Doctor Jacquelin Dubuisson. He claimed to suffer from an illness contracted at La Force and looked forward to a healthier, more comfortable environment for the duration of his imprisonment, which he hoped would soon end.⁴³⁵ He received no response, prompting him to

⁴³¹ *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 2, document 237.

⁴³² The detailed list of Malet’s military services is not particularly impressive, especially considering other generals and servicemen with whom Napoleon associated on a personal level. *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 2, document 238.

⁴³³ *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 2, document 237.

⁴³⁴ *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 2, document 235.

⁴³⁵ *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 2, document 239.

write again on 9 October 1809 and to revert to his previous request for freedom. He reminded Savary of his previous letter which had gone unanswered before asking directly for his release. He swore “on my word of honor” that he would leave Paris and return only if the Emperor saw it fit in the future.⁴³⁶ On 12 January 1811, Malet finally received a response to one of his letters. It was not, however, a response to his request for complete freedom. Instead, it was his wish to transfer to Doctor Dubuisson’s rest home that officials had approved. The judgment behind moving Malet to a less scrutinizing location than Saint-Pélagie is questionable, as he had already escaped from one of Paris’s most notorious prisons. Whether the officials had hoped to purchase Malet’s loyalty by granting the relocation or whether they simply believed that the general, now in his mid-fifties, would finally abandon his treacherous ways is unknown. Whatever their reasoning, the officials unwittingly provided the determined dissident a dangerous opportunity, one that Malet quickly seized.⁴³⁷

Doctor Dubuisson’s rest home in no way provided the same security measures in place at either La Force or Saint-Pélagie. The residence more closely resembled a retirement center for criminals than a facility designed to keep them within the law and under surveillance. Étienne-Dénis Pasquier, who replaced Dubois as Prefect of Police in 1810, explained that “any one confined in a private hospital was simply looked upon as a prisoner on parole, and nothing was easier for him than to escape, as in those places there were neither guard, wicket, railing, or bolt. The proprietor of the establishment was alone responsible for those entrusted to his care.”⁴³⁸ The

⁴³⁶ *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 2, document 240.

⁴³⁷ Masson claims that Prefect of Police Dubois and the warden of Saint-Pélagie were responsible for approving Malet’s transfer to Doctor Dubuisson’s rest home. Correspondence between Dubois and Malet was not found in the *Archives Nationales*, nor was the letter approving the transfer. Masson, *La Vie et les conspirations*, 166.

⁴³⁸ Étienne-Dénis Pasquier, *Mémoires du chancelier Pasquier: Histoire de mon temps* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit & Co., 1893-1895), 2: 14.

small and relaxed environment allowed Malet's friends and family to visit as they pleased, often with no supervision. Using such visits to obtain information about the public opinion of Parisians and about Napoleon's latest military endeavors, Malet closely monitored events in preparation for a new attempt at ridding France of its allegedly tyrannical leader.

Malet understood the need for perfect timing if he hoped to achieve what he—and others—had failed to do in the past: to overthrow Napoleon. To recognize the right opportunity when it presented itself, he needed to understand the political and social atmosphere of France, an easy enough task, he thought. He also needed to keep abreast of military events, another straightforward undertaking, given his background and rapport with other high-ranking officers. By October 1812, Malet believed that French society was ready—and eager—for a change of regime. Loyalty to Napoleon wavered, especially among his closest advisors. Economic conditions in France had faltered, and military endeavors in Russia were going poorly. Malet began hatching his next plot to destroy the imperial government, anticipating support from high-ranking officials and soldiers, as well as the common citizens, all of whom he believed were disillusioned with Napoleon's reign.

Confident that the plan he adapted from Servan—forged government documents and co-conspirators in high-ranking positions—offered the best hope of success, Malet had begun revising it almost immediately after its failure in May 1808. He accepted no personal responsibility for the disappointing outcome of that effort; instead, he blamed his two boisterous cohorts who had been unable to keep their temperaments under control. Taking to the extreme his desire to limit his accomplices had led to the hastily fabricated one-man attempt against the government at the *Te Deum* of 29 June 1809. After this embarrassing failure, he acknowledged the futility of acting alone and began seeking out trustworthy confidants.

The relaxed security at Dubuisson's allowed Malet to converse freely with fellow prisoner Abbé Jean Lafon, a dedicated Royalist, who ultimately convinced him that a successful strike against the Empire would require the joint effort of all anti-Bonapartist camps.⁴³⁹ United in their belief that a conspiracy involving too many people would be doomed from its outset, the two men further continued revising Malet's original plot, taking into consideration their desire to inform as few people as possible of their intentions.⁴⁴⁰ Although security was nearly non-existent at the rest home, Malet and Lafon acknowledged the need for accomplices on the outside who could handle various preparatory details. Turning to men with whom they were already acquainted, they confided in three of them: Abbé José de Caamaño, a Spanish cleric whom Lafon had met while both men were serving time at La Force, Alexandre Boutreux, a law student and political dissident whom Malet most likely met through the clandestine group known as the *Philadelphes*, and Jean Rateau, a distiller turned career military man.⁴⁴¹

Despite various revisions—fewer people aware of the plot and no accomplices already installed in the government—the plan closely resembled Malet's designs of 1808, using the announcement of Napoleon's death as grounds for the changes explained in a forged *senatus-consulte* and in orders to the troops stationed in Paris. To convince military officials that the orders he would deliver were valid, Malet planned to wear his own military decorations that clearly marked him as a general. He also wanted his accomplices to exude legitimacy and entrusted the acquisition of several additional uniforms and weapons to his wife and Rateau. On the chosen date for the plot, Malet and Lafon would escape from Dubuisson's rest home and

⁴³⁹ Garros, *Le Général Malet*, 175.

⁴⁴⁰ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 17.

⁴⁴¹ The only source that provides a first name for Boutreux is the *Times* (London), which addresses him as Alexandre-Andre Boutereu. *Times* (London), 13 January 1813.

meet their co-conspirators at Abbé Caamaño's home. After changing into their uniforms and arming themselves, the men would head to the nearby Popincourt barracks and present the forged orders to the officers in charge. Once in control of several military units, Malet planned to lead the troops to various strategically important locations throughout the city, arresting high-ranking political officials—and anyone else who might dare to stand in his way—and replacing them with men he deemed worthy as the plot unfolded. His initial accomplices—Lafon, Caamaño, Boutreux, and Rateau—would not receive positions in the new government but, presumably, would collect other forms of reward once the plot succeeded.

To achieve the individual tasks culminating in the creation of Malet's provisional government, which bore no name this time, the conspirators relied on both speed and the element of surprise. Malet expected to persuade military and government officials to follow him simply by presenting authentic-looking orders and by explaining that the Senate had had to act immediately on learning of the Emperor's death. He wanted his actions to be seen as the result of the deliberate and legal decisions made by the Senate, not as a revolution. Success would be his, Malet thought, once his accomplices had replaced several critical political positions and his provisional government had met at the Hôtel de Ville. Adhering to Lafon's idea that a successful overthrow would need to placate Monarchists as well as Republicans, Malet chose men from both political camps to serve in his provisional government, just as Napoleon had done in his own regime.⁴⁴² Once assembled, he planned to announce to the new regime the abolition of the

⁴⁴² The individuals who would receive positions in the new government if Malet's conspiracy succeeded in 1812 included several who had been listed as members of his attempted Dictatorship. Whereas the Dictatorship would have consisted of nine men, the planned provisional government of 1812 consisted of 15. In his forged *senatus-consulte*, Malet listed the following people as members of the pending government (those marked with asterisks denote people also listed as members of the Dictatorship): *General Moreau, who would serve as President; Carnot as Vice-President; General Augereau; Jean-Adrien Bigonet; *Senator Destutt-

imperial government and make three crucial declarations: that Napoleon was an outlaw, a seemingly unnecessary step if, in fact, the Emperor had died, that his marriage to Marie-Louise was annulled, and that the King of Rome was illegitimate and thus ineligible to inherit his father's throne.⁴⁴³ After such announcements, Malet believed he would finally have succeeded in overthrowing Napoleon's regime.

During October 1812, several weeks had passed without any news reaching Paris from the Emperor and his *Grande Armée*. The lack of information quickly prompted rumors and speculation as to what might be happening in Russia. Already aware that the campaign had not gone well, Parisians were increasingly nervous as each day passed. Thinking the city rife with inquietude and disillusionment, Malet believed that the latest opportunity for him to strike against Napoleon had presented itself. With the Emperor in Russia and no imperial bulletins forthcoming, he knew that verification of Napoleon's death would be a slow and difficult undertaking. Given the recent lack of information received from the army, Malet did not expect such an announcement to meet much, if any, disbelief, especially if seemingly official government documents seconded the claim. The nation's current situation caused him to think "that the downfall of Napoleon not only could, but should be immediate. He was convinced that it could be easily decided by the slightest effort, especially if this effort was attempted in the capital."⁴⁴⁴ Confident that the time to act had come, Malet advised his four accomplices that they would implement their plot on the night of 11 October. Again, though, he saw his plans foiled through no fault of his own.

Tracy; *Florent-Guyot; Prefect of the Seine Frochot; Jacquemont; *Senator Lambrechts; Mathieu Monmorency; *General Malet; Alexin Noailles; *Vice-Admiral Truguet; Senator Volney; and *Senator Garat. *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 1, document 136.

⁴⁴³ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 33.

⁴⁴⁴ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 15.

On the chosen night, Malet and Lafon successfully escaped from the rest home and arrived at Abbé Caamaño's residence without difficulty. Once there, they settled several last-minute details such as dating the forged *senatus-consulte* and the orders to various military units stationed throughout the city. Rateau was to provide the conspirators' uniforms and weapons, the final necessary step before initiating the plot itself. As the designated meeting time passed, however, Rateau was still missing. When he finally did arrive toward morning, his fellow conspirators feared that the most opportune moment had passed.⁴⁴⁵ As the group disbanded for the night, Malet and Lafon returned to Dubuisson's. Although they had escaped undetected, their effort to break back into the rest home drew the attention of their overseer. He reprimanded them for having left the facility without permission and warned that he intended to advise Fouché's successor as minister of police, René Savary, Duke of Rovigo, of their flight. Whether he ever filed such a report is unknown, but regardless of what action he took—or failed to take—the two prisoners had not yet resigned themselves to failure. They decided to reschedule their plot for 22 October, a date by which they hoped Dubuisson would again have relaxed his watch over them.

Dubuisson locked the residence at 11:00 p.m. each night after ensuring that his three charges were in their rooms.⁴⁴⁶ Having successfully slipped out of the rest home eleven nights earlier, Malet and Lafon had no worries about doing it again. With Dubuisson convinced that they were in their rooms, the two conspirators climbed out of their windows into the courtyard and retraced their steps back to Abbé Caamaño's residence. Unlike their prior attempt, everyone arrived without delay. Considering the torrential rain falling outside, however, the group decided

⁴⁴⁵ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 19.

⁴⁴⁶ Comte Louis de Gobineau, *Les Mémoires du Comte Louis de Gobineau*, edited by Jean Puraye (Brussels: Éditions Erasme, 1955), 13.

to postpone taking immediate action, choosing instead to drink punch while waiting for a break in the weather.⁴⁴⁷ According to Ernest Hamel, this initial delay brought about the failure of Malet's plot. In his opinion, "if things had been executed during the night, not a single civil or military authority would have had the time to recognize [what was happening], and the conspiracy would probably have enjoyed complete success."⁴⁴⁸

Finally, the group acknowledged that any action that night would have to take place in the rain. As Malet reached the door to leave, Abbé Lafon stopped him. He seemed to have lost confidence and begged the general not to attempt the overthrow. "Stay," he pleaded, "the guillotine is at the door."⁴⁴⁹ Dismissing his accomplice's fears and still determined to restore the French Republic, he set out with Rateau and Boutreux around 3:30 a.m.⁴⁵⁰ The two clergymen remained behind as Caamaño's sole task of providing a meeting place was complete, and Lafon was too nervous for any further active participation.

By 4:00 a.m., the trio of conspirators had made their way through Paris' rainy streets to the Popincourt barracks, where Malet planned to obtain the military force with which he would overthrow the Empire. Upon reaching the garrison's entrance, Malet provided the morning's password and gained immediate access. The day's key word—ironically, "*conspiration*" (conspiracy)—had been delivered to the general that afternoon by a soldier stationed at Popincourt.⁴⁵¹ He quickly sought out Colonel Gabriel Soulier, the man in charge of the National Guardsmen stationed at the barracks. Initially, Soulier seemed of little use to Malet for he was

⁴⁴⁷ Duruy, "La Conspiration," 643.

⁴⁴⁸ Duruy, "La Conspiration," 643.

⁴⁴⁹ Henri Dourille, *Histoire de la conspiration du Général Malet* (Paris: Bureau de l'histoire de France, 1840), 39.

⁴⁵⁰ Duruy, "La Conspiration," 643.

⁴⁵¹ Billard, *La Conspiration*, 44.

asleep, suffering from fever and influenza, but the illness was a lucky accident for the conspirator. Fuzzy minded, Soulier neglected to inspect the forged *senatus-consulte* and Orders of the Day intended for the Guardsmen carried by Malet and paid little attention to the personal letter summarizing the actions to be undertaken. Had he thoroughly reviewed the documents, he would have noticed several questionable aspects that might have brought the conspiracy to an end before it began.⁴⁵² Malet explained that “the Senate is assembled. The Emperor died on the 7th of this present month before Moscow; and we come to give you information of a *Senatus Consultum* given this night, with an Order of the day, and a letter addressed to you, concerning the service with which you are charged under these circumstances; and in which you will act in concert with M. Frochot, Prefect of the Seine.”⁴⁵³ Soulier also learned that he was to receive a promotion to general and was also to cash an order for 100,000 francs.⁴⁵⁴ He was to distribute the funds among the men at Popincourt as a sign that they would receive their pay on time under the pending regime. Ordinary Guardsmen would receive higher than normal recompense and officers twice their normal rate.⁴⁵⁵

Soulier was to read the announcement of Napoleon’s death to the Guardsmen before arming his troops and leading them to the Place de Grève and Hôtel de Ville, where he was to make arrangements for a room in which the provisional government could meet later that morning. He was also to station a detachment at the bell tower of Saint-Jean “to sound the tocsin

⁴⁵² In his testimony, the lack of clarity Soulier had concerning the events of 22 October becomes apparent. He initially explains that Malet read to him the forged documents. Later, he states that Malet did not read the entirety of the documents because he interrupted him with questions about some of the men named within them. He then advises the commission that he is not sure whether the documents were read in their entirety. *Archives Nationales*, 505Mi/36.

⁴⁵³ *Archives Nationales*, 505Mi/36.

⁴⁵⁴ *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 1, document 143.

⁴⁵⁵ *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 1, document 143.

at the moment when this became necessary,” calling everyone in Paris to action.⁴⁵⁶ Explaining that his sorrow over the news of the Emperor’s death had exacerbated his illness, Soulier opted to remain in bed for a while longer, appointing Adjutant-Major Antoine Piquerele to inform the Guardsmen of the recent developments.⁴⁵⁷ By lamplight in the pouring rain, the troops learned that the Emperor had died in Russia and that the nation would immediately return to a Republic. Now presumably in charge of the government, General Malet promised them “promotions, rewards, and vacations.”⁴⁵⁸ As recorded in various memoirs, the reaction to the news varied depending upon the source. Some described “cries of *Vive la nation*,” while others reported that “there was not a cry, not a word, nothing but a great stupor.”⁴⁵⁹ Whatever the actual response, Soulier pulled himself from bed to undertake his orders while Malet personally led 1,200 men to La Force prison.

By 6:30 a. m., Malet and his troops arrived at the prison where he planned to free several detainees whom he believed would help further his plot. He immediately ordered the release of Generals Joseph Guidal and Victor Lahorie—two men with whom he had previously served—and a Corsican, Joseph Boccheiampe, a former Sergeant Major and Guidal’s cellmate.⁴⁶⁰ The

⁴⁵⁶ *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 1, document 143.

⁴⁵⁷ *Archives Nationales*, 505Mi/36.

⁴⁵⁸ Dourille, *Histoire de la conspiration*, 44.

⁴⁵⁹ Dourille, *Histoire de la conspiration*, 44. Duruy, “La Conspiration,” 644.

⁴⁶⁰ Little information is available about Boccheiampe. He was born in Oletta, Corsica in May 1770 to Pierre and Anne Marie Salicetti. He served under General Pierre Antoine, Count Dupont de l’Étang and had been a prisoner of state for several years prior to Malet’s conspiratorial efforts of 1812. The amount of time he spent imprisoned varies according to the source. One source reports six years, while another reports ten. During the interrogation concerning his involvement in Malet’s plot, Boccheiampe states that he had initially been “arrested in 1803 in Parma.” Lewis Goldsmith, ed., *Cours politique et diplomatique de Napoléon Bonaparte comme Général en Chef des Armées républicaines, comme Premier Consul et comme Empereur et Roi, et du gouvernement français ou Recueil de traités, actes, mémoires, décrets, ordonnances, discours, proclamations, etc., depuis mai, 1796, jusqu’à la second abdication de Bonaparte, en juin 1815, et contenant tout ce qui s’est passé en France pendant sa dernière usurpation*

order met with no resistance. When the door of his cell opened with orders to follow the guard, Guidal believed that the time for his transfer to Marseille for trial had come.⁴⁶¹ Lahorie could conjure no explanation for his impromptu release and, therefore, “was slow in making his appearance; he was abed when called, and he took some time to get ready.”⁴⁶² Finally appearing before his liberators, he recognized Malet as a fellow soldier, though he thought he had been a prisoner for some time. Although both men were aware of Malet’s status as a known political malcontent, they had no more misgivings about the announcement of a provisional government than those unfamiliar with his past. Convinced that the news of Napoleon’s death was legitimate, the three men brought the plot closer to reestablishing the French Republic.⁴⁶³

Malet gave copies of his forged *senatus-consulte* to his three newly-released accomplices. He ordered them to seize the offices or personal apartments of several key political figures throughout the city, to arrest these men, and then to take their place in power. Boccheiampe made his way to the Prefecture of the Seine where he encountered no resistance in establishing himself as Prefect because Count Nicolas Frochot, who currently held the position, had not yet arrived at the office.⁴⁶⁴ Lahorie and Guidal went immediately to the home of Minister of Police Savary. They found him still in bed and had little trouble placing him under arrest.⁴⁶⁵ With

(London: De l’Imprimerie de R. Juigné, 1816), 5: 844. *Lancaster Journal*, “Capture of Moscow,” 14 January 1813. Jean Baptiste Hyacinthe Lafon, *Histoire de la conjuration du Général Malet, avec des détails officiels sur cette affaire*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Maugeret and Beraud, 1814), 262.

⁴⁶¹ Dourille, *Histoire de la conspiration*, 45.

⁴⁶² Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 21.

⁴⁶³ Jean Marie Savary, *Mémoires du Duc de Rovigo, pour servir à l’histoire de l’Empereur Napoléon*, (Paris: A. Bossange, 1828), 6: 28.

⁴⁶⁴ Philippe-Joseph-Benjamin Buchez, *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française, ou Journal des assemblées nationales, depuis 1789 jusqu’en 1815* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paulin, 1838), 39: 385. *Times* (London), 4 January 1813.

⁴⁶⁵ Duruy, “La Conspiration,” 645.

Savary on his way to La Force prison, Lahorie took control of this key ministry. Although he had not actively resisted the news of his arrest and replacement, Savary's life was in danger. Malet had authorized each man assisting him to use any method of coercion or intimidation—including unrestricted violence—to achieve the plot's goal.⁴⁶⁶ Only Lahorie's intervention kept Savary safe from the wrath of Guidal, a man who harbored personal animosity toward the minister. At one point, as he led the former minister to prison, Guidal pointed his sword at his prisoner's chest and demanded to know if he recognized him. "I am General Guidal, whom you had arrested in Marseilles and brought to Paris," he explained.⁴⁶⁷ Savary did, in fact, recognize the man as one he had placed under arrest less than a year earlier. Lahorie promised the minister, despite Guidal's constant threats of physical harm, that he had "fallen into the hands of a generous enemy, and you shall not be put to death."⁴⁶⁸

Shortly after 7:00 a.m., having installed Savary at La Force, Guidal led Boutreux and a detachment of Guardsmen to the personal apartments of Prefect of Police Pasquier.⁴⁶⁹ Pasquier examined the order calling for his arrest and the forged *senatus-consulte* that Guidal presented to him and immediately concluded that each document was fraudulent. In his memoirs, Pasquier noted, "it was an easy matter for me to see at a glance that these documents were apocryphal, and concocted by men who were ignorant of the form in which they were usually couched."⁴⁷⁰ Placed in a carriage destined for La Force prison, Pasquier—whose position Boutreux seized—attempted to convince his escort that "he was the dupe of a gross imposture, that he was

⁴⁶⁶ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 23.

⁴⁶⁷ Munro Price, *Napoleon: The End of Glory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 24.

⁴⁶⁸ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 23-24.

⁴⁶⁹ Duruy, "La Conspiration," 645.

⁴⁷⁰ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 24.

doubtless not aware of the consequences of his participating in a most guilty enterprise, and that it might cost him his life.”⁴⁷¹ The explanation went unheeded.

Unlike his previous attempts to overthrow Napoleon’s regime, which saw themselves frustrated from the outset by eavesdroppers, lack of real planning, and tardiness, the plot of 22 October was already Malet’s most successful, having been underway for three and a half hours. By 7:00 a.m., men loyal to Malet’s provisional government had subjugated both the Ministry of Police and the Prefecture of Police without resistance.⁴⁷² Thus far, the plot had unfolded perfectly, but Malet was not deluded enough to expect that it would continue so smoothly. Having maintained under his command 150 of the Guardsmen he had obtained earlier that morning, he set out to achieve what he believed would be one of the most difficult individual tasks of the entire enterprise: neutralizing the governor of Paris.

Count General Pierre-Augustin Hulin had earned a hero’s reputation because of the active role he played in the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789. Less illustriously, he had also presided over the sham of a trial that convicted and executed the Duc d’Enghien in 1804. He distinguished himself in the armies of Napoleon and received the position of Grand Officer of the Legion of Honor in 1809. Hulin was a determined man who could not be seduced or intimidated into acting against his will. If anyone were going to thwart the plan, Malet expected it to be the governor and, therefore, kept for himself the task of subduing him.⁴⁷³

Arriving at Hulin’s apartment in the Place Vendôme, Malet barged into the bedroom to find him still sleeping in bed next to his wife.⁴⁷⁴ Malet immediately launched into the

⁴⁷¹ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 24, 88.

⁴⁷² Duruy, “La Conspiration,” 646.

⁴⁷³ Duruy, “La Conspiration,” 646.

⁴⁷⁴ Duruy, “La Conspiration,” 646.

explanation that Napoleon had died in Moscow and that the Senate had abolished the imperial government, replacing it with a Republic. Malet had two more announcements for Hulin: that he was under arrest, and that he, Malet, would replace him in his position as governor of Paris.⁴⁷⁵ Seeing her husband baffled into silence, Countess Hulin intervened, hoping to bring her husband back to his senses. She advised him that if the news delivered were true, Malet would have corresponding written orders.⁴⁷⁶ Rousing himself, Hulin asked to see such orders, to which Malet calmly replied in the affirmative, asking him to join him in the office. Once in the adjoining room, Malet revealed not the orders he claimed to possess but a pistol.⁴⁷⁷ Without further elaboration, he shot Hulin in the face. The bullet entered his jaw, but the injury did not prove fatal.⁴⁷⁸

Colonel Soulier had pulled himself from bed around 7:00 a.m. and made his way to the Hôtel de Ville.⁴⁷⁹ Count Frochot, the Prefect of the Seine, had received a sloppily scrawled note earlier that morning stating that the Emperor was dead. Rushing to his office to seek details, he arrived shortly after Soulier and his Guardsmen. Soulier presented Frochot with copies of Malet's forged *senatus-consulte* and Orders of the Day which, unlike himself, Frochot carefully examined. Finding discrepancies in these documents, he began questioning Soulier about the situation: "I immediately looked for the signature, and finding it to be Malet, demanded to know

⁴⁷⁵ Duruy, "La Conspiration," 646. Gobineau, *Les Mémoires*, 15.

⁴⁷⁶ Duruy, "La Conspiration," 646.

⁴⁷⁷ Savary, *Mémoires du Duc de Rovigo*, 6: 34.

⁴⁷⁸ Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, *Mémoires de M. de Bourrienne, ministre d'état, sur Napoléon, le directoire, le consulat, l'empire, et la restauration*, (Paris: Ladvocat, 1829-1830), edited by R. W. Phipps, translated as *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* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 3: 314.

⁴⁷⁹ He arrived at the Hôtel de Ville between 7:30 a.m. and 8:00 a.m., according to his testimony before the military commission. *Archives Nationales*, 505Mi/36.

why it was not signed by General Hulin, and who was this General Malet? The Commandant replied, ‘my General is wounded, and General Malet is Chief, or one of the Chiefs of the General Staff.’⁴⁸⁰

Whereas the orders to Lahorie and Guidal had been to arrest various government officials, Soulier was simply to inform Frochot of the change in regime and to have him make arrangements for the provisional government’s meeting later that day.⁴⁸¹ Wanting to have everything ready when Malet and the other members of the new regime arrived—and seemingly unconcerned about having been replaced as Prefect—Frochot delegated various tasks to other officials at the Hôtel de Ville.⁴⁸² Despite his nearly unquestioning compliance, Frochot later maintained that he had not been convinced of the legitimacy of the orders he received. In self-defense, he asserted, “[I] fled to my own house, leaving the two Officers behind, telling them that I was going to change my boots; but deliberating in my own mind on what was to be done, and on the means of having an interview with the Prince Arch-Chancellor.”⁴⁸³ Frochot failed to reach Arch-Chancellor Cambacérès, however, until late that afternoon, and by then, arrangements for the first meeting of Malet’s new Republican government were in place.

⁴⁸⁰ *Times* (London), 4 January 1813.

⁴⁸¹ In his testimony on 25 October, Soulier stated emphatically that he had not been the one who made arrangements for the provisional government’s meeting place, despite what the commission may have taken from his explanations a few days before. *Archives Nationales*, 505Mi/36.

⁴⁸² *Times* (London), 4 January 1813.

⁴⁸³ The idea that Frochot remained entirely loyal to Napoleon’s regime is unconvincing, despite his claims. Soulier testified before the military commission several times that Frochot advised him to carry out the orders he had received from Malet on the morning in question. At one point, Soulier explained that Frochot directed him to follow Malet’s orders, even as he was mounting his carriage intending to visit the Arch-Chancellor. *Archives Nationales*, 505Mi/36. *Times* (London), 4 January 1813.

Leaving Hulin's, Malet next led his troops to the home of Adjutant-General Pierre Doucet, from whom he expected to acquire authority over more troops. It was here where everything began to go wrong. Prior to setting his plot in motion, Malet had written Doucet a personal letter, an action he thought would have won the Adjutant-General's allegiance to his cause.⁴⁸⁴ But upon reviewing the *senatus-consulte*, Doucet immediately questioned the validity of the document presented to him.⁴⁸⁵ Further complicating the situation was the unforeseeable visit of Alexandre de Laborde, a police inspector, to Doucet's apartments that morning. His very presence caused a change in Malet's attitude. His composure dissolved as Laborde, recognizing him as a political malcontent who was supposed to be locked away in Doctor Dubuisson's rest home, declared, "Monsieur Mallet [sic], you do not have permission to leave your home unless I come looking for you."⁴⁸⁶

Believing himself in another situation where only violence would assure the plot's success, Malet reached for his pistol. Before he could fire, however, Laborde and Doucet wrestled him to the ground and placed him under arrest.⁴⁸⁷ Rateau, who had accompanied Malet, vainly cited the *senatus-consulte* as authorization for the actions taken over the last several hours.⁴⁸⁸ He drew his sword in hopes of rescuing the general, but quickly found himself under arrest as well.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁴ Guillon does not go into the details of the letter written by Malet to Doucet. He simply states that because such an anticipatory action had been taken, Malet expected to encounter no resistance from him. Guillon, *Les Complots militaires*, 183.

⁴⁸⁵ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 27.

⁴⁸⁶ Savary, *Mémoires du Duc de Rovigo*, 6: 33.

⁴⁸⁷ Savary, *Mémoires du Duc de Rovigo*, 6: 34.

⁴⁸⁸ Guillon, *Les Complots militaires*, 183.

⁴⁸⁹ Dourille, *Histoire de la conspiration*, 54.

At roughly 9:45 a.m., Laborde and Doucet brought the two conquered conspirators in bonds before the soldiers Malet had led to the house. “The Emperor is not dead!” Doucet exclaimed. “Your father lives still! These men are imposters!”⁴⁹⁰ Chants of “*Vive l’Empereur!*” immediately filled the air, after which the troops returned to their barracks as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred, a sign that Malet believed heralded the official end of his plot.⁴⁹¹ Not only was he, the conspiracy’s mastermind, in custody, but he had failed to achieve the true allegiance of the men who had aided his cause thus far. Although the situation was coming under control, Doucet and Laborde knew that Paris and the imperial regime were not safe until each of Malet’s co-conspirators—both the deliberate and the unwitting—were under arrest. In fact, had his accomplices been more active in their duties, the plot might yet have succeeded despite Malet’s arrest.⁴⁹²

Having replaced the Duke of Rovigo as minister of police, Lahorie busied himself not with the duties of his new position but with finding a tailor to fit him clothing appropriate to his new station.⁴⁹³ When Inspector Laborde and a detachment of troops arrived at the Ministry, he announced to Lahorie that he was under arrest for having conspired with General Malet to overthrow Napoleon’s imperial regime. Upon hearing that he had been part of an illegal bid for political power, he proclaimed his innocence, swearing that he had no knowledge of the illegitimacy of Malet’s claims, apparently discounting the relevance of historical precedent. He simply believed that he was taking part in yet another government change—“I believed I was seeing another 18 Brumaire, and I followed General Malet, the same way that twelve years ago I

⁴⁹⁰ Dourille, *Histoire de la conspiration*, 54.

⁴⁹¹ *Journal de Paris*, 24 October 1812.

⁴⁹² Guillon, *Les Complots militaires*, 184.

⁴⁹³ Gobineau, *Les Mémoires*, 17.

had followed Bonaparte”—ushered in by the chaos of the Revolutionary spirit that had pervaded France for more than two decades.⁴⁹⁴ When Laborde asked how so sloppy an imitation as the *senatus-consulte* issued by Malet could have deceived him, Lahorie confessed that he had not read a single line of the document, believing Malet’s explanation of the situation as proof enough of the circumstances facing the nation. Upon closely inspecting the forgery, Lahorie dejectedly allowed his own arrest, avowing, “It has never been said that I lacked either intelligence or judgment, and it would be necessary to look upon me as the most obtuse of men, to pretend that I willingly took part in an imposture so rashly concocted. No, I was the first dupe of General Malet, and I am his wretched victim.”⁴⁹⁵

Boccheiampe was the only one of Malet’s unwitting conspirators to take his position in the government seriously.⁴⁹⁶ As soon as he had installed himself as Prefect of the Seine, he set to work signing the day’s paperwork as if his promotion from prisoner to Prefect was nothing out of the ordinary. When Malet’s plot began to unravel, however, he was quick to abandon his post in hope of fleeing the police searching for him. On 24 October, authorities arrested him when they found him hiding in a nearby residence.⁴⁹⁷ Unlike Lahorie and Boccheiampe, who spent at least

⁴⁹⁴ Lahorie’s protestation of innocence because he felt he was participating in another 18 Brumaire is unconvincing. The events of 18 Brumaire had also been conspiratorial and illegal. The only reason Napoleon and his co-conspirators were not arrested for their actions was because they had succeeded. Saint-Hilaire, *Histoire des conspirations*, 395.

⁴⁹⁵ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 35.

⁴⁹⁶ Boccheiampe apparently took his promotion to prefect seriously despite the absurdity of the situation. His placement in Malet’s government seems unlikely and random, based solely on the fact that he was Guidal’s cellmate on that fateful night. Boccheiampe claims that he was unaware of Guidal’s anti-Napoleonic views, describing him as a man “devoted to the French cause and principles, as a man of honor and as a very generous man.” He seems not to understand why his cellmate’s political views would be enough to cast doubt on his own loyalty to Napoleon. Regardless of his cellmate, Boccheiampe’s defense seems to overlook the obvious and damning fact that he did, in fact, act against Bonaparte’s regime by accepting Malet’s offer of the position of Prefect of the Seine. Lafon, *Histoire*, 266.

⁴⁹⁷ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 33.

a brief time in their new offices, Guidal had abandoned his post immediately after replacing Henri Clarke, Duke of Feltre, as minister of war. Rather than undertake the position's duties, he left for a restaurant to have lunch. A detachment of troops found him, "fork in hand," quickly placed him under arrest, and returned him to prison.⁴⁹⁸

With each of the conspirators under arrest, the rightful government officials went about reinstalling themselves in their offices and returning the city to normal, a task that was complete by noon that same day.⁴⁹⁹ The ruse had been so convincing, however, that Prefect of Police Pasquier had a difficult time in re-entering his office, when troops refused to admit him without an order signed by Malet.⁵⁰⁰ Prefect of the Seine Frochot, who had given orders for the preparation of a meeting room for the new provisional government, had no trouble in retaking his post. He immediately tried to set everything right, hoping to prevent anyone from suspecting him as a conspirator. Only then did he make his way to Arch-Chancellor Cambacérès to explain to him what had happened.⁵⁰¹

Although the conspiracy enjoyed several hours of success, the Parisian populace was entirely unaware of the events until the authorities had restored order.⁵⁰² Malet had hoped that the citizens would rally to his cause upon hearing that he wanted to return the nation to a Republic and free them from the tyrannical Napoleon. His hopes might not have been completely misplaced. Minister of Police Savary described France as "a country so susceptible to the contagion of example," seeming to validate Malet's expectation that the nation would rally

⁴⁹⁸ Duruy, "La Conspiration," 647.

⁴⁹⁹ Thiers, *Histoire du Consulat*, 14: 531.

⁵⁰⁰ Guillon, *Les Complots militaires*, 184.

⁵⁰¹ Duruy, "La Conspiration," 647.

⁵⁰² Jacques Barthélemy Salgues, *Mémoire pour servir à l'histoire de France sous le gouvernement de Napoléon Buonaparte et pendant l'absence de la maison de Bourbon* (Paris: Librairie de J. G. Dentu, 1826), 9: 207.

to support him.⁵⁰³ There was no uprising or any sympathetic sentiment, however, when a brief written statement by the minister of police announcing the plot's unfolding and subsequent failure, appeared in *Le Moniteur Universel* on the morning of 24 October. The information given by Savary was vague, providing only the names of the plot's masterminds—Malet, Lahorie, and Guidal—and the assertion that the disturbances they caused had been minor.⁵⁰⁴ He explained that “absolute calm reigns in Paris; there was no trouble but in the offices where the brigands visited.”⁵⁰⁵ In fact, the *Journal de Paris* reported enthusiastic cries of “*Vive l'Empereur!*” from citizens of all classes when the statement was read aloud.⁵⁰⁶ People in the city discussed Malet's plot “as a piece of outrageous folly,” if they bothered to speak of it at all.⁵⁰⁷ Newspapers emphasized Parisians' positive reaction for several days after the conspiracy had taken place. “We insist on this point,” an article from 31 October explained, “because it honors the character of the inhabitants of Paris, and proves that they know their true interests, which cannot be separated from respect for the law and love of the sovereign.”⁵⁰⁸

Wanting to maintain the tranquility that had persisted throughout Paris during Malet's undertaking and to put the ordeal in the past as quickly as possible, Arch-Chancellor Cambacérés and Minister of War Henri Clarke organized a commission of seven military officers, which held its first meeting on 24 October.⁵⁰⁹ The trial of twenty-four alleged conspirators, including Malet,

⁵⁰³ Savary, *Mémoires du Duc de Rovigo*, 6: 39.

⁵⁰⁴ Savary's inclusion of Lahorie and Guidal as two of the conspiracy's masterminds is intriguing, since neither man had, in fact, been one of Malet's original partners. Arguably, they did not learn of the plot until he had them released from prison.

⁵⁰⁵ *Le Moniteur Universel*, 24 October 1812.

⁵⁰⁶ *Journal de Paris*, 24 October 1812.

⁵⁰⁷ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 27.

⁵⁰⁸ *Journal de Paris*, 31 October 1812.

⁵⁰⁹ The military commission consisted of Count Dejean, Baron Deriot, Baron Henri, Gével, Colonel Moncey, Thibaut, and Delon. Boudin served as court clerk. *Le Moniteur Universel*, 30 October 1812.

began four days later.⁵¹⁰ During it, several issues hampered the accused men's ability to defend themselves. Boccheiampe, a Corsican, pointed out that his knowledge of French was inadequate and might prevent him from understanding the questions the commission presented. Likewise, they might find his responses difficult to follow. One of the judges quickly replied, "we will understand you enough."⁵¹¹ An understandable response, given the fact that Boccheiampe had not felt hampered by the language barrier when he took his position as prefect of the Seine. None of the defendants were offered legal counsel, and when Colonel Soulier complained at the outset of the trial, a judge assured him, sarcastically, that they would have the opportunity to write to lawyers that evening, sniping that "all lawyers do not go to bed at eight o'clock."⁵¹² Malet was quick to reply that by then the "jailers are in bed and the prisoners are locked down, without light."⁵¹³ Ultimately, only one of the defendants managed to obtain the services of a defense counsel, who generously offered to say a few words on behalf of the other defendants as well.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹⁰ Those men placed on trial with Malet were: Victor Claude Alexandre Fanneau Lahorie, Maximilien Joseph Guidal, Gabriel Soulier, Gomont (called Saint-Charles, his birth name), Antoine Piquere, Louis-Charles Fessart, Louis-Joseph Lefebvre, Nicolas Josué Steenhower, Louis-Marie Regnier, Joachim-Alexandre Lebis, Joseph-Louis Boccheiampe, Pierre-Charles Limozin, Jean-Charles-François Godard, Hilaire Beaumont, Jean-Joseph Julien, Pierre Borderieux, Jean-Henri Caron, George Rouff, Jean-François Rabbe, Amable-Aimé Provost, Joseph-Antoine Viallevielhe, Jean-Baptiste Caumette, and Jean-Auguste Rateau. Boutreux and Caamaño also faced trial, though not until after the original hearing. Boutreux (reported as Alexandre-Andre Boutereu) had sought refuge in Courcelles, but was discovered, condemned to death, and ultimately executed on 30 January 1813. Caamaño remained in prison until his acquittal on 29 January 1813. Abbé Lafon escaped prosecution, having fled to Louhans using an alias until after the Bourbon Restoration. *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 2, document 241. Guillon, *Les Complots militaires*, 175, 191. Gobineau, *Les Mémoires*, 13.

⁵¹¹ Duruy, "La Conspiration," 648.

⁵¹² Duruy, "La Conspiration," 648.

⁵¹³ Duruy, "La Conspiration," 648.

⁵¹⁴ Duruy, "La Conspiration," 648.

Perhaps the most damning aspect of the trial was the judges' preconceived notion of the men's guilt. The wording of the accusations left little room for debate. Malet's official charges were straightforward enough. He stood "accused of a crime against the interior security of the State, by an attack of which the goal was to destroy the Government and the successive order of the throne, and of exciting the citizens and residents to arms against the imperial authority."⁵¹⁵ His fellow defendants, on the other hand, faced the simple and vague charge of "complicity with Malet."⁵¹⁶ Several of the men adopted as their defense the claim that they were simply unwitting dupes of Malet's deceitful plan, having been wrought with emotion upon hearing of Napoleon's untimely death. Given the wording of the charge they faced, however, this assertion hardly seems a sufficient defense.

Jean-François Rabbe, one of the accused, justified himself by stating that "in losing the Emperor, he lost his protector; he burst into tears and did not think [about the fact] that in a monarchy the son succeeds the father."⁵¹⁷ Colonel Soulier also sought to defend his actions in this manner, citing his military service and multiple wounds sustained during it as evidence against the idea that he would knowingly act against the legitimate French government.⁵¹⁸ He testified, "because of the state of the illness that I found myself in, and because of the emotion that the false news of his Majesty's death caused in me, I completely lost my mind."⁵¹⁹ Following this explanation, one of the judges snapped at him, declaring that during a crisis when someone unknown to him declares that the Emperor is dead is precisely the moment when military and civil officers need to keep their wits about them and handle the situation

⁵¹⁵ *Le Moniteur Universel*, 30 October 1812.

⁵¹⁶ *Le Moniteur Universel*, 30 October 1812.

⁵¹⁷ Gobineau, *Les Mémoires*, 14.

⁵¹⁸ Dourille, *Histoire de la conspiration*, 66.

⁵¹⁹ *Archives Nationales*, 505Mi/36.

appropriately.⁵²⁰ While the military commission failed to accept the validity of such a defense, Prefect of Police Pasquier believed in the men's innocence. In his memoirs, he sympathized with the accused: "The officers of their command sought refuge in the obedience which they considered they owed to their superiors in rank. It is a fact that among them all, not one was to be found who could be called intentionally guilty."⁵²¹

Each man, excepting Malet, professed his innocence throughout the trial. Some hoped to save their lives while others had already resigned themselves to the idea of facing the firing squad. One of the most vocal in proclaiming his virtue, Colonel Soulier, continuously begged for his life, reminding the panel of judges that he had "a wife and four children."⁵²² General Lahorie's performance at the hearing was stoic. When given the opportunity to address the panel of judges, he explained, "At all events . . . I am aware of the doom that awaits me; I do not speak for the purpose of saving my life, but to establish the truth, and to defend my memory from the odious charges with which it might be sought to dishonor it."⁵²³ Malet made no effort to defend his actions to the commission, declaring that "the man who has constituted himself the defender of his country has no need of any defense: he triumphs, or goes to his death."⁵²⁴

The questioning of Colonel Soulier was unforgiving. During the first round of questioning, the commission accused him of supporting Malet's efforts because of the promised promotion to General of Brigade and the 100,000 francs. Soulier replied, "It was neither one nor the other."⁵²⁵ As a commanding officer accustomed to reviewing official documents, he could

⁵²⁰ *Archives Nationales*, 505Mi/36.

⁵²¹ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 40-41.

⁵²² Dourille, *Histoire de la conspiration*, 66.

⁵²³ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 40.

⁵²⁴ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 40.

⁵²⁵ *Archives Nationales*, 505Mi/36.

easily have determined that the ones delivered by General Malet were forgeries, if he had taken the time to review them for himself. For example, the order given to him for 100,000 francs had no date, but came from an alleged senatorial meeting on 11 October 1812. When reminded that these and other discrepancies—and the fact that Malet had advised him to sound the tocsin if necessary—should have confirmed in his mind the illegitimacy of the events underway, Soulier acknowledged the fact, but reiterated that he had been too ill and emotionally distraught to act as he normally would have.⁵²⁶

While the judges did not seem to believe that the high-ranking officials could possibly be as gullible as they claimed, Malet defended each of his alleged accomplices, arguing that they were simply following the orders of a superior officer, exactly what their training taught them to do. He added that had any of them not conformed to his wishes, he would have forced them to do so.⁵²⁷ Clearly, his threat was true, given his shooting of General Hulin. Malet maintained that “alone he had done everything, trusting for the success of his enterprise to a spontaneous outburst of the feelings of hatred and indignation experienced by all classes, and which could not fail to respond to the first given signal.”⁵²⁸ During the interrogation, one of the judges asked Malet directly who his accomplices had been. Again, he explained that he had acted alone, but added that if his plan had succeeded, he would have been joined by “all of France, even

⁵²⁶ Although Soulier’s explanation of his illness as the cause of his questionable actions is convincing, one of his fellow defendants testified that he had not appeared sick to him on the night in question. The commission asked him to explain why Piqueret had testified that he “had not appeared to him to be in such a state.” Soulier offered that Piqueret may be trying to deflect blame from himself onto the Colonel.

During his interrogation, when asked whether he had placed troops in a position to sound the tocsin, Soulier vehemently denied doing so. *Archives Nationales*, 505Mi/36.

⁵²⁷ Dourille, *Histoire de la conspiration*, 66.

⁵²⁸ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 36.

yourself.”⁵²⁹ His willingness “to take upon himself the entire responsibility . . . revealed the nobility of his character,” according to Prefect of Police Pasquier.⁵³⁰

After an unusually brief hearing—a mere three days—the military commission reached its decision concerning the fate of each of the accused, handing down its judgment on 29 October 1812. Although the panel determined “that the entire conspiracy had been the personal work of Malet, and that his followers were the victims of a lamentable credulity,” fourteen men were sentenced to death for their roles in the plot.⁵³¹ The remaining ten were acquitted of any wrongdoing.⁵³²

As the condemned men made their way to the Plaine de Grenelle on 30 October to face the firing squad, Rateau and Rabbe benefited from a last minute decision to spare their lives, leading to suspicion that they had confessed to the police crucial information such as the participants and the working details of Malet’s plot.⁵³³ Prefect of Police Pasquier found Rateau’s

⁵²⁹ Salgues, *Mémoire*, 9: 210.

⁵³⁰ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 40.

⁵³¹ Those unanimously convicted of their crimes and sentenced to death were Malet, Lahorie, Guidal, Soulier, Steenhouwer, Borderieux, Piquerel, Fessart, Lefebvre, Regnier, Beaumont and Rateau. Rabbe received the death penalty by a vote of six to one. Boccheiampe also received the death penalty by a vote of five to two. *Le Moniteur Universel*, 30 October 1812. Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 39.

⁵³² The unanimously acquitted were Gomont (called Saint-Charles), Lebis, Provost, Godard, Viallevielhe, Caron, Limozin, Julien, and Caumette. A sufficient vote of three to four also exonerated Rouff. Their acquittal did not necessarily mean freedom, though. When informed of the decision made by the military commission, Napoleon made his own decrees on the fates of the men. He included in this decree two men who had not been on trial with Malet: Lamotte could be freed, but had to leave Paris and Denoyer was to remain imprisoned. As for those who had been tried along with Malet, Provost was to be freed and remain employed in the military; Godard’s and Viallevielhe’s fates would be determined after the Emperor received more information about their involvement in the conspiracy; Gomont, Lebis, Limozin, Caron, Julien, Caumetter and Rouff were to “be stripped of their ranks and imprisoned as prisoners of State” until he issued a new order. *Le Moniteur Universel*, 30 October 1812. *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 1, document 142.

⁵³³ On 29 October 1812, Minister of Police Savary wrote to Arch-Chancellor Cambacérés announcing the pardon of Rabbe and Rateau. The decision came after a discussion with two of

reprieve especially bewildering. He pointed to Rateau's having been one of Malet's initial accomplices, "present at the first meeting" when the plot was being devised.⁵³⁴

The theatrical qualities of the entire ordeal and discrepancies in protocol did not end with the trial. Transported to the Plaine de Grenelle in a number of carriages, the doomed men continued to play the same roles as they had during the court proceedings. Lahorie remained composed, Soulier constantly mumbled, "my poor children, my poor family," and Guidal shouted slurs against Napoleon.⁵³⁵ The loudest performance was that of General Malet himself. Leaning out the window of his carriage, he yelled to anyone within hearing distance, "recall the 23rd of October!" and "I fall, but I am not the last of the Romans."⁵³⁶ He regretted his machinations only because his failure would leave his wife and son impoverished and at the mercy of his political opponents.⁵³⁷ The others traveled in stupefied silence, awestruck that they had not only been found guilty of participating in a political plot against Napoleon's imperial regime but were to pay for having done so with their lives.⁵³⁸

the military commission's members, Dejean and Deriot. Minister of War Clarke had written to Savary on the same day in support of the pardon. *Archives Nationales*, BB/3/145.

⁵³⁴ Pasquier, *Mémoires*, 2: 41.

⁵³⁵ Dourille, *Histoire de la conspiration*, 68.

⁵³⁶ Dourille, *Histoire de la conspiration*, 67-68. Duruy, "La Conspiration," 649.

⁵³⁷ In fact, Denise found herself arrested and imprisoned on 23 October 1812 along with the other conspirators. She remained detained for just under a year because of her husband's undertaking. In a letter she wrote to Napoleon himself on 28 August 1813, she claimed to have had no knowledge of her husband's conspiratorial designs, explaining "the name that I carry is my only crime." Napoleon agreed to end the widow's detention at the Reformatory of the Madelonnettes on 9 September 1813, but decreed that she was to remain under surveillance. It seems that her release was not immediate, however, as the Prefect of Police wrote to the Minister of War on 17 December 1814 that Denise could be freed, but on the condition that she leave Paris. Upon her release, the Emperor offered her a monthly stipend and a scholarship for her son to attend military school. Promptly refusing both gifts, she replied to him, "I would rather work to provide for myself, and leave my son to the charge of his friends, than to have any obligation to my husband's murderer." *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 2, documents 170, 175-176. Dourille, *Histoire de la conspiration*, 69-70.

⁵³⁸ Buchez, *Histoire parlementaire*, 39: 388.

At 3:00 p.m., at the Plaine de Grenelle, the condemned were lined up against a wall, facing a twenty-five man firing squad.⁵³⁹ Contrary to protocol, Malet himself led the execution. He told his accomplices to prepare themselves for the volley. The squad fired. Once the smoke had cleared, Malet could be seen, standing unharmed before the wall, his hand over his heart. The first volley of bullets had failed to kill two others as well, though it had, at least, knocked them to the ground. Bordérieux cried out “*Vive l’Empereur!*” before addressing Malet, “Go, poor soldier, your emperor received, like you, a mortal strike.”⁵⁴⁰ Staring at his ineffective executioners, Malet shouted, “Fire again, already!”⁵⁴¹ Lahorie, lying on the ground still alive, amended, “me too, for fuck’s sake!”⁵⁴² A second volley silenced Bordérieux and Lahorie. Malet, using his last breath to profess his political ideology, muttered “*Vive la liberté*” before falling face first to the ground.⁵⁴³

Napoleon learned of Malet’s failed plan against him on 6 November 1812, when he arrived in Mikhailovka, Russia.⁵⁴⁴ A waiting messenger described the people involved, outlined the basic events of the plot, and informed him of the execution of the conspirators. Reports to the Emperor and to other generals in the field consistently expressed that the plot created no effect in the city at large: “Paris is quiet. The inhabitants and the garrison took no part in these

⁵³⁹ There is some discrepancy concerning the exact time of execution. In a letter from the Minister of Police Savary to Arch-Chancellor Cambacérès dated 29 October 1812, the time is given as 3:00 p.m. An announcement concerning the execution in *Le Moniteur Universel* on 30 October, however, gave the time as 4:00 p.m. *Archives Nationales*, BB/3/145. *Le Moniteur Universel*, 30 October 1812.

⁵⁴⁰ Dourille, *Histoire de la conspiration*, 68.

⁵⁴¹ Léonce Grasilier, “Le Procès-verbal de l’exécution du général Malet et de ses complices,” *L’Intermédiaire des Chercheurs & Curieux* LXVII, no. 1367 (20 June 1913): 816.

⁵⁴² Grasilier, “Le Procès-verbal,” 816.

⁵⁴³ Dourille, *Histoire de la conspiration*, 69.

⁵⁴⁴ Adam Zamoyski, *Moscow 1812: Napoleon’s Fatal March* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 407.

disturbances, of which they were unaware.”⁵⁴⁵ The reassurance did little to assuage Napoleon’s concern over the willingness with which his high-ranking political and military officials embraced the idea of a provisional government replacing his own. The security of his empire—which he thought he had achieved with the birth of his son was clearly in question. Stupefied that a political prisoner could so easily threaten all he had created, Napoleon exclaimed to his secretary, Louis de Bourrienne, “It would appear that my crown is not fixed very firmly on my head if in my own capital the bold stroke of three adventurers can shake it.”⁵⁴⁶ His anger grew as reports from various ministers in Paris arrived. Each man related information concerning the plot in such a manner as to minimize the role he had played in Malet’s success.

Stunned by events that had taken place in Paris, Napoleon commented to his advisers who had accompanied him on the Russian campaign that his presence was required back in France. “In the current state of things,” he told them, “I can only impose on Europe from the Tuileries palace.”⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁵ *Archives Nationales*, F/7/3054, dossier 6.

⁵⁴⁶ Bourrienne, *Mémoires*, 3: 315.

⁵⁴⁷ Armand Augustin Louis de Caulaincourt, *Mémoires du Général de Caulaincourt, duc de Vicence, Grand Écuyer de l’Empereur*, introduction and notes by Jean Hanoteau (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1933), 2: 196.

CHAPTER SEVEN CONCLUSION

In modern times, the term “conspiracy” often brings to mind incredible theories about ancient alien theory or government cover-ups. In earlier eras, conspiracies and conspiracy theories were a part of life that impacted people of all social standing. In terms of French history, prior to and during the Revolution of 1789, conspiracies were more theoretical than actual. Popular politics introduced by the Revolution created a sense of mistrust and misunderstanding. Believing there was only one correct path for the nation to travel, individual deputies alleged that their associates of a different opinion were conspiring against the republic. There was, in fact, no substance to these assertions. They were driven by inexperience and paranoia. Only after the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte to political power—through a successful conspiracy on 9 November 1799—did clandestine intrigues become tangible. Dissidents launched actual plots against the Consular and Imperial governments, largely involving attacks against Napoleon himself. The conspirators intended to bestow upon themselves or their preferred leader the political power of France. Because Napoleon had achieved this very feat, political malcontents believed that they could accomplish the same.

Conspiracy became a viable political tool, but only in the hands of capable and clever individuals. Napoleon and his cohorts used an illegal plot to propel themselves to the highest ranks of the political sphere. Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès already held one of the most prominent positions in the government when he helped design the plot of 18 Brumaire. Napoleon’s participation brought with it the assistance of the military. With both the political and military realms at least partially supportive—and the social realm increasingly indifferent by this point—success was likely. Those dissidents who conspired against the Consular and Imperial regimes, on the other hand, saw their attempts backfire. Their efforts to overthrow Napoleon’s

governments instead strengthened the leader's grasp on the political reins of France. The failure of the conspirators achieved the exact opposite of what they intended.

The incompetence of those who acted against Napoleon's Consular regime is readily apparent through an analysis of the traits required to constitute a conspiracy. Although the plots did, in fact, include each of the characteristics outlined by Niccolo Machiavelli and Augustin Barruel, they were not well managed. Machiavelli identified five traits necessary to elevate a simple plan to a conspiracy: at least two participants, the participants were well-off or "madmen," secrecy, a political nature to the plot, and violence.⁵⁴⁸ Barruel concurred with two of Machiavelli's conclusions, that a conspiracy must be secretive and violent. He added two more characteristics, however, which included a hierarchy among the conspirators and a plot's self-destructive nature.

Even the required traits the Jacobin and Royalist conspirators excelled at ultimately worked against them. One such trait was the involvement of two or more people in the plot. Machiavelli and Barruel both acknowledged this requirement, but Machiavelli cautioned against including too many people, as it made the scheme difficult to control. Joseph Antoine Aréna and Joseph Céracchi claimed to have dozens of supporters within the French military for their *conspiration des poignards*. Ultimately, there were, in fact, only four participants, who enjoyed absolutely no backing whatsoever from anyone. The infernal machine plot of December 1800 involved numerous people whose significance varied dramatically. Only three people played an active role in purchasing supplies or in building the explosive device. They had several more associates who supported their cause but did not actively participate in the scheme. In winter

⁵⁴⁸ Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Historical, Political and Diplomatic Writings of Niccolo Machiavelli*, translated by Christian E. Detmold (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1882), 2: 332.

1804, Royalist beliefs that France was ripe with dissent and animosity toward Napoleon prompted the Bourbons to authorize and to fund the voyage of forty of their supporters to Paris. This large group of schemers was under the leadership of three masterminds, Georges Cadoudal, Jean-Charles Pichegru, and Jean-Victor Marie Moreau. The loss of so many supporters to a plot whose foundation was not, in fact, well-established brought the Royalist efforts against Napoleon and his nation to an end.

The large number of individuals involved in the plots made it extremely difficult to maintain a sense of secrecy, an important aspect of conspiracy. Machiavelli had advised, for this very reason, against engaging more than three or four people. With so many conspirators involved, it was unlikely that the scheme could remain undetected. Secrecy held long enough for the participants of the infernal machine plot to explode their device, but it fell apart with the first arrest. The effective use of aliases among the conspirators complicated the police investigation until they placed François-Jean Carbon under arrest. He promptly betrayed his cohorts' trust by divulging everything he knew, including their whereabouts. Participants in the Royalist effort of winter 1804 gave away the plot almost as soon as it began. Arriving with the first batch of conspirators from England on 21 August 1803, Jean-Pierre Querelle found himself under arrest by 11 October. His incapacity to keep a secret showed itself again in January 1804, when the threat of execution prompted him to reveal everything he knew to officials. The testimony proved immensely beneficial for the police and for Querelle himself, who received a full pardon and a government-funded pension. Whereas authorities cracked the infernal machine plot and the Royalist effort of winter 1804 because of participants' testimonies after arrest, they had a spy working for them inside the network of the *conspiration des poignards* almost as soon as it began to take form. Dominique Demerville foolishly discussed his political discontentedness

with Jacques Harel, a man who had previously served under his command in the military. Harel panicked and related each of his conversations to officials. His denunciation allowed the police to steer the conspiracy down a road it might not have taken otherwise and, therefore, to protect the First Consul, maintaining political stability for the nation.

Each of the plots launched against Napoleon was inherently political in nature. Whatever form of government the conspirators preferred in lieu of the Consulate, conspiratorial action was necessary in order to implement it. According to Machiavelli, it was the politics behind these events that resulted in their violent nature. Aréna and Céracchi intended to assassinate Napoleon with daggers as he attended a theatre performance. Pierre Robinault, known as Saint-Réjant, adopted an even more violent approach with his infernal machine, which did not accomplish its goal of murdering the First Consul but did result in the death of at least twenty people.⁵⁴⁹

Barruel argued that the political nature of a conspiracy was not the cause of its violent nature but that it originated with the radical disposition of the conspirators themselves. The Royalist effort of winter 1804 illustrated his idea. Although the conspirators did not agree on the desired outcome of their attack against Napoleon on the road between Malmaison and Paris—some described capture and others assassination—violence was inherent. Georges Cadoudal intended to attack the First Consul with a force of at least one hundred men. If the group had managed to implement its plan, the attack would have looked more like a small battle than a traditional assassination. Even though the plot never took shape, violence still occurred. As officials

⁵⁴⁹ Almost every account of the carnage on the rue Saint-Nicaise describes at least twenty people dead. Isser Woloch counts, however, only nine dead. The duchess d’Abrantès explains that nine people died on the day of the attack, but that twenty-nine ultimately succumbed because of their wounds. Isser Woloch, *Napoleon and His Collaborators: The Making of a Dictatorship* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001), 66. Laure Junot, *Memoirs of the Duchess d’Abrantès (Madame Junot)* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1832), 363.

attempted to arrest Cadoudal, he shot two of them, one fatally. Another leader of the conspiracy, Pichegru, was unwilling to endure his imprisonment any longer and committed suicide by strangling himself in his cell.

Cadoudal, Pichegru, and Moreau had organized their plot hierarchically, as Barruel believed was necessary to create an actual conspiracy, but such a system did not ensure a plot's success. The *conspiration des poignards* was so disorganized that no individual conspirator understood who was involved or what role he was to play. Each of the core participants named supporters who turned out, in fact, not to be complicit in the crime. Céracchi identified Joseph Diana as Napoleon's intended assassin and claimed to have given him a dagger to use for the deed at the theatre where the attack was to take place. For his own part, Diana denied that the plot designated him as the assassin. He also did not possess any kind of weapon on his arrest and had taken no action whatsoever except to seat himself within the theatre. The Royalist plot of 1804 was hierarchical, but only obviously so at the uppermost levels. The Bourbon princes were at the pinnacle of the conspiracy, as it was they who helped fund the actions and who would enjoy the most benefit from its success. As the ones who would implement the actual plan and lead the politicians and military in the subsequent chaos, Cadoudal, Pichegru, and Moreau were on the next level. There may have been an organizational system among the other forty participants, but it did not show itself clearly because the plot never came to fruition. The infernal machine plot was the only orderly one launched during Napoleon's reign as Consul. Saint-Réjant had designated himself as the plot's leader simply because he was older than the other participants. After appointing himself responsible for lighting the explosive device, he sent his only two active associates to the Tuileries palace environs to indicate the First Consul's departure. Although his cohorts disappeared without a trace and without ever giving him a

signal, Saint-Réjant remained dedicated to his role and managed to detonate the destructive device, though too late to murder Napoleon.

A self-destructive nature was the final trait of a conspiracy identified by Barruel. Even if a plot managed to accomplish its goal, its success would be short-lived. Because none of the conspiracies initiated during the Consular regime enjoyed any level of success, it is impossible to know if they would have self-destructed down the road. The only remotely successful plot was that of General Claude-François de Malet, who acted during Napoleon's imperial, rather than Consular, reign. During the night of 22 October and early the following morning, Malet and his cohorts managed to confound or to capture several of the most high-ranking political officials in Paris. The plot self-destructed when police inspector Alexandre de Laborde confronted Malet at the home of yet another official he was trying to dupe. The general's entire disposition changed, and his confidence faltered. He attempted to rectify the situation by shooting Laborde, but the officer tackled him to the ground and placed him under arrest before he could act. The ringleader's own failings brought down the plot as a whole. Thus marked the end of the only conspiracy to enjoy any level of success against either of Napoleon's regimes.

General Malet's efforts against Napoleon in 1812—and even his abortive attempt in 1808—differed greatly from the conspiracies that preceded it. Malet was, without a doubt, the leader of the plot as a whole. He enlisted the help of four men at the earliest stages of planning and obtained additional support as the plot unfolded. At the trial, a total of twenty-four men found themselves facing charges of conspiracy. Several of them had willingly participated in the scheme, while others proved nothing more than unfortunate fools. It was not only the number involved that made a conspiracy, according to Barruel, but also the participants' ability to work

together: “union is as essential to the conspirator, as secrecy to the cause.”⁵⁵⁰ The plots launched against the Consular regime included the requisite number of people, but few of the participants managed to work together. The incomplete instructions and constantly changing details in the *conspiration des poignards* made for a team that could not cooperate. The participants in the infernal machine plot worked together smoothly until the day of the attack. Saint-Réjant stood guard by the explosive device waiting for a signal from his associates. When the signal never came, he investigated and learned that his cohorts had abandoned their posts. By the time he returned to the bomb, the appropriate time to ignite it had passed. Had his associates followed through with their tasks, the group likely would have succeeded in assassinating the First Consul. The Royalist plotters of 1804 believed that teamwork was one of their strongpoints, convinced that everyone knew the plot and his role in it before sailing to France from England. Upon the first discussion with Moreau, however, they learned that their plot was no longer functional. One of the key players in the conspiracy had chosen personal ambition over that of the Bourbons, leaving the Royalists without hope and leading to his co-conspirators’ deaths.

The failed efforts against the Consular government had all included violent plans from their inceptions. Malet’s plot did not. The conspirators of 1812 had a concrete plan in which they would convince high-ranking officials of Napoleon’s death and would urge them to join their cause or to face arrest. No one involved resorted to violence except Malet himself and only as a last resort. Malet shot and wounded one official and, when Laborde recognized him as an escaped political prisoner, he attempted to do the same or worse to him. The implementation of

⁵⁵⁰ Augustin Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism, Vol. I: The Antichristian Conspiracy* (London: T. Burton and Company, 1797), 42.

violence marked the beginning of the end for his efforts. Failing to shoot Laborde, Malet found himself wrestled to the ground and arrested. Had he managed to keep his composure, he might have been able to continue with the implementation of his plan. It is unlikely, however, that the French people would have allowed him to maintain control of the country once they learned that their Emperor was, in fact, still alive.

Throughout the Consulate, Napoleon's strong reputation as a military commander, his continued successes on the battlefield, and the apparent strength of the regime—especially when compared with the impotent Directory that preceded it—made French citizens hopeful. They expected the First Consul to restore the nation's prosperity and to end the warfare that had plagued them since the Revolution's early days. When Aréna and Céracchi launched the *conspiration des poignards* on 10 October 1800, Napoleon had not been in power for a year. Even if they had succeeded in assassinating Napoleon, they would not have enjoyed the affection or enthusiasm of the French nation. Citizens would have viewed them as murderers. The same timing issue existed for Saint-Réjant and his cohorts. Parisians considered the infernal machine horrific, not only because of its intended goal, but because of the carnage it wrought on the streets. Again, if Saint-Réjant had succeeded, he would have achieved only a reputation as a violent murderer of innocent people who also took the life of the First Consul. Little had changed by the Royalist conspiracy of winter 1804. A brief period of peace had delighted French citizens. Because England declared war on France again in May 1803, had Cadoudal, Pichegru, and Moreau achieved a Bourbon restoration through their conspiracy, the people of France would have viewed it as an English machination, rather than a victory solely for the banished French royals. The involvement of a foreign power meant that the French citizens

would have resented the restoration even more than if the royals achieved it independently and would have been even more likely to work to destroy the monarchy yet again.

Malet believed that the political and military environment in which he acted in 1812 was entirely different from that which his predecessors faced. He believed that French citizens had grown weary of the constant warfare they experienced under Napoleon's leadership. That the Russian campaign was not progressing favorably was widely known. If Malet succeeded in implementing his new regime, he would put an end to the war and France would not have to suffer more of the same under the "bastard infant" who was poised to take his father's throne.⁵⁵¹ To his chagrin, Malet learned too late that Napoleon's reputation remained solid among Parisians. Even the soldiers he duped into following his command as he unfolded his plot immediately turned from him when officials told them Napoleon was not, in fact, dead. The citizens whom Malet expected to rally to his cause showed no warm feelings for him whatsoever upon news of the conspiracy. They rejoiced in the news that the Emperor lived and denounced Malet as a dangerous "crazy person," a sentiment shared by their leader.⁵⁵²

When Napoleon helped create the Consulate after the conspiracy of 18 Brumaire, he believed the regime's most dangerous enemy was the Royalist faction. The new government he and his associates had put into place was, after all, Republican. Napoleon understood that the hope of revenge and restoration would persevere as long as the Bourbon family was not in control of France. Dethroned and exiled, they engendered support from Europe's other royal households. The financial and military might of these allies gave them seemingly limitless potential to launch an attack. Napoleon recognized that the Republicans within France were

⁵⁵¹ *Archives Nationales*, F/7/6499, plaque 1, document 137.

⁵⁵² Armand-Louis-Augustin de Caulaincourt, *Mémoires du général de Caulaincourt, duc de Vicence, grand écuyer de l'Empereur* (Paris: Plon et Nourrit, 1933), 2: 126.

fickle, with differing conceptions of how the government should function. There was the possibility that a group of them could unite to strike against his regime, but their chance of success was slim. The military's attachment to the First Consul, especially in the lower ranks, would prevent the soldiers from supporting any action against him. Without military backing, a conspiracy would not succeed. His reasoning was sound, but Napoleon soon learned that he did not understand the political situation in France as well as he thought.

Plots from both camps politically opposed to his leadership showed Napoleon that he had not succeeded in healing the Revolutionary wounds as well as he thought. He managed, however, to use the conspiracies to his own advantage, obtaining more power for himself, and, he argued, more stability and security for France. The *conspiration des poignards* was the clumsy and uninspired project of a small handful of incompetent Jacobins. Even if Harel had not proven to be a police spy, the group had no hope of achieving even the slightest modicum of success because of its high level of mismanagement and miscommunication. The only success that came from the plot was enjoyed by Bonaparte. "To see and to seize an opportunity was instinctive with him" and that is precisely what he did in light of the botched conspiracy.⁵⁵³ Napoleon took no immediate action after the effort, but harkened back to it after Saint-Réjant's explosive device missed killing him by mere seconds. It did not matter to him that there was no evidence of Jacobin participation in the latest plot. He ordered Fouché to fashion a list of known members who would bear the brunt of his anger and retribution. These men found themselves deported from the country, having committed no crime and having faced no trial. Napoleon could not resist the opportunity to rid himself of 130 political opponents, innocent or not. The unjustified banishment quashed any further clandestine action against him from the Republican

⁵⁵³ J. Christopher Herold, *The Age of Napoleon* (New York: American Heritage, Inc., 1991), 9.

camp. Discussions continued among discontented Republicans about the need for a new leader or a new regime, but there were no tangible or serious threats to Napoleon from them until the efforts of Joseph Servan de Gerbey and his successor, Malet.

Having nullified the Jacobins by early 1801, Napoleon faced open opposition only from the Royalists for most of his reign. He had long considered treating with the papacy in Rome to mollify many of his constituents, but the nearly successful attack against his life on 24 December 1800 pushed him into action. He understood that a reconciliation between the French Republic and the Catholic Church would remove one of the Bourbons' strongest supporters. If the pope endorsed his rule, he could not support schemes against it. In July 1801, Napoleon and Pope Pius VII signed the Concordat. Although the arrangement disappointed Revolutionaries who saw the restoration of religion, especially of the hierarchical and conservative Catholic Church, as a step backwards, it did not prompt them to take any action against the First Consul. Many of the *chouan* fighters put down their weapons upon learning of the Church's reestablishment. Those who had led their battles against Republican France, however, remained dedicated to the Bourbons.

Even devoted royalists like Cadoudal did not take further action against the Consulate for several years. By winter 1804, when they believed France ripe for the restoration of the monarchy, they were unable to form a cohesive plan of action. The bungled conspiracy did, however, restore France to a monarchical form of government, but it was that of Napoleon, not the Bourbons. The First Consul used the mismanaged plot to suggest to the Senate, which then agreed, that he should take the imperial title of Emperor to shelter the nation from the chaos that would ensue should something happen to him. He had restored a sense of stability to French politics, but he could not guarantee what would become of it if his enemies succeeded in killing

him. In response to cries of tyranny from some of his officials, Napoleon answered, falsely, that the Revolution had been against the Bourbons, not against monarchy itself. After all, the Revolutionaries only decided to rid themselves of the monarchy once Louis XVI proved entirely unwilling to retain his title with a constitution in place. Napoleon indicated that the marriage of Revolutionary ideals with the stability of a hereditary monarchy under the leadership of someone who cherished the nation's citizens offered the best of both political worlds. Upon learning that the Senate had, in fact, decided to transition the Consular regime into an imperial one, Cadoudal was said to have lamented: "I came to make a king and instead I have made an emperor."⁵⁵⁴

Some historians have argued that the plots launched during the Consular regime were figments, orchestrated entirely by French police for the benefit of Napoleon. Mismanaged and poorly conceived as they were, the conspiracies did, in fact, exist. Although he was the kind of person who had always had ambitious plans—even his brothers recognized it when they were children—he neither fabricated nor ordered someone else to fabricate the attempts against him. He did, however, exploit the events to their fullest extent. His political opponents, Jacobin and Royalist alike, had hoped to climb the social ladder as he had done after 18 Brumaire. What they accomplished was to fall off of it themselves while simultaneously pushing Napoleon even higher up the rungs to the prestigious position of Emperor.

⁵⁵⁴ Frank McLynn, *Napoleon: A Biography* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2002), np.

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VITA

Kelly Diane Jernigan, *née* Whittaker, was born and raised in Roanoke, Virginia. She received her Bachelor's degrees in French and History from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in December 2002. She moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana to increase her knowledge of French history in August 2005. At Louisiana State University, in December 2007, she received her Master's degree in History. Having completed her exams and dissertation, and minor fields in Intellectual European History and Medieval French History, she will receive her Doctor of Philosophy degree in History in May 2015.